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CULTURAL LEADERS OF INDIA

Devotional Poets and Mystics

Part-II

SURDAS ● NARASIMHA MEHTA ● MIRA ● RUPA GOSWAMIN
HARIDASAS ● RAHIM ● JAYASI ● RASKHAN ● TUKARAM
SAMARTH RAMDAS ● BHADRACHALA RAMADAS
SHAH ABDUL LATIF ● TAYUMANAVAR ●
RAMALINGA SWAMI

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DEVOTIONAL POETS AND MYSTICS

PART II

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DEVOTIONAL POETS AND MYSTICS

PART II

Surdas○ Narasimha Mehta○ Mira○ Rupa Goswamin○
Haridasas○ Rahim○ Jayasi○ Raskhan○ Tukaram○
Samartha Ramdas○ Bhadrachala Ramadas○
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PREFACE

At the end of the classical age, in the post-Sankara period and with the rise of Gorakhnath and the Nath-Sampradaya there arose in the different parts of the country a line of Saints and Mystics who brought the wisdom of the ancients, the Rishis and the Acharyas, to the common people. They adopted the local language and used the medium of song in their mission. They were pilgrims, all the time moving among the people. They came from all classes and strata of the society, which in itself was the outcome of the universality and the basic oneness of men that they proclaimed. They might have risen in diverse schools of religion or philosophy, but all of them emphasised the fundamental truth, and the eternal values. With satire and sarcasm, and in homely language with similies and symbols, they declaimed against hypocrisy and corruption, empty forms and rituals and all kinds of sham. Their plea was for sincerity of faith and fellowship of beings and integration of the whole man. When the great Hindu kingdoms declined, imusions increased, the ideas and institutions of Dharma and Bhakti were in peril, these minstrels of God, always on their feet, kept up the morale of the people, and through the attraction of the form with which they played, with freshness and variety, on the refrain of morality and character, and the superiority of special values over mundane pursuits revitalised the devotion and faith, the Bhakti and Sraddha of the classes and the masses. In the coming together of cultures, confrontation was not the only result; there was also a synthesis which gave rise to saints who bridged the gulf and spoke the same voice of integration.

The wide coverage that the subject provides has been kept in presenting these men of God. Because of their number and their

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detailed treatment, these Devotional Poets and Mystics had to be given in two large volumes. Some names may appear to have been left out, but they will appear in some other volumes, those on the Ramayana-Mahabharata-Bhagavata Poets, Teachers and Musicians.

This Volume, the second part, on the Devotional Poets and Mystics, offers another fourteen of them; five from the Hindi speaking areas; three from Western India (Gujarat and Maharashtra), one from the East (Bengal), a group of saints, the Haridasas of Karnataka; two from Tamil Nadu and one each from Sindh and Andhra Pradesh. Four of them were Muslims who spoke to Hindus and Muslims alike. Some of them were active participants in politics and public affairs but maintained the poise and peace of their soul, and were adepts in the art (Kausala) of Nivritti in Pravritti, a lesson which is the ever relevant message of the Gita.

Among the writers of these articles are, besides University Professors and writers, Vice-Chancellors and High Court Judges who sent their articles at different times. It was thtrefore not possible to present the Saints in a rational arrangement. But arranged or not arranged, flowers are flowers !

Thanks are due to these authors who have participated in the blessings of these Saints whose lives and lessons they have dwelt upon.

Here is one more open book of God-realisation !

V. RAGHAVAN

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SURDAS

J. R. Verma

Surdas, the blind bard and ardent apostle of *Krishna Bhakti,* belongs to that small set of supreme mystics who emphasized pure devotion and simple faith as a sure path to the highest religious experience. Between the 13th and the 16th century the *Bhakti* cult (devotional movement) encompassed the entire country. Essentially humanistic in its approach, it wove a synthetic pattern out of the various strands of faiths and cultures. They visualized the concept of a loving personal God and resolved the perpetual opposition between the personal and the impersonal, the transcendent and the immanent, static and dynamic aspects of the Divine Nature; between the Absolute of philosophy and the 'sure true friend' of devotional religion. They did this by ascending to a height of spiritual intuition at which these aspects are 'melted and merged', and perceived as the completing opposites of a perfect whole. God is here felt to be not the final abstraction, but the one actuality, the Omnipresent Reality, the All-Pervading, teaching and companioning each soul, 'the Mind within mind'.

The Movement did not aim at establishing a new religion or creed, it only reinterpreted and restated what had already existed, so as to bring it closer to the people and to make it a part of their life. At a time when people were passing through a phase of despondence and helplessness, these spiritual savants of the age, both by precept and example, infused the people with an awareness of new horizons, of social, moral and spiritual goals of life. Their teachings have been interwoven into the life, character and speech of the millions inhabiting the country for more than three hundred years. Composing their verses in local dialects they also unconsciously set in motion a movement for the development of the Indian languages. Their teachings—

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tender and powerful, simple and tremendous, rank high in the world of religious poetry. Springing from their hearts, these teachings, through their intense sincerity, reach the deepest recesses of our emotional and spiritual consciousness.

Surdas's life, as that of many other poets of the age of Devotion, is steeped in mystery. Only legends and stray reflections help to knit together a plausible pattern, a sort of an approximate biography. A lot of speculation still exists over details regarding his date of birth and life, but fortunately none regarding the fact of his existence. Relying on available evidence, it would be safe to conclude that this renowned saint-poet was born in a village named Siri on the oustkirts of Delhi, towards the end of the 15th Century (widely accepted date is 1478 A.D.). With Delhi stretching its outward bounds and claiming dozens of villages in the neighbourhood, it would be futile to trace out the exact topography of the village. Again, distance and lack of any authentic account have helped in dramatizing and even romanticizing the life of an otherwise simple, devout saint into that of an amorous adventurist. Some have tried to establish that he was married and was very much tied up with bonds of domesticity; some others have strayed further and have tagged on to his youthful days the legendary, but incredible episode of another devotional mystic Bilvamangal.

The facts, however, can be fairly adduced to establish that Surdas was neither married, nor did he ever find himself in the amorous meshes of a woman of questionable morals. Blind from birth, he renounced the world at an early age and set out, led by his inner illumination, to seek the Lord, the ultimate refuge of the handicapped, the dispossessed and the down-trodden. Instinctively intelligent, he, through his deep perception, visualised what his physical eyes failed to record. He moved from one place to another—a seeker after Truth, an explorer into the ultimate Reality, till he reached, at the age of 18, 'Vishram Ghat' in Mathura. Thence he shifted to 'Gau Ghat', said to be between Mathura and Agra, on the banks of the sacred Yamuna.

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His fame as a devotee and poet had already travelled far. Once Shri Vallabhacharya, the great saint-savant of the age, halted at 'Gau Ghat' during his itinerary, and listened to the devotional compositions sung by Surdas in his melodious voice. Vallabhacharya, however, counselled him to sing of Lord's Creative Play (*Bhagvat Lila*). Surdas took this advice to heart and was initiated by the great *Acharya* into the mysteries of pure contemplative devotion. He attained a mystic vision which unfolded to him the entire Divine Play, and spontaneous outpourings of devotional melody started flowing through his musical throat. He settled permanently in Vraj, its soil still fragrant with the aroma of the childhood and love-sport of Lord Krishna. It was, therefore meet that Sur's devotion sprouted and attained its full blossoming in this sacred soil. He lived there, till the end came (in 1583 A.D., according to a majority of critics and commentators) and this devout bard, whose very life was like a strain from his Lord's flute, or a playful eddy on the sacred Yamuna, as if intolerant of any further separation from his Master, attained the final fulfilment and his thirsty soul submerged into the Supreme Soul. The mortal frame still lay prostrate before the Lord's image in Srinath temple situated on Mt. Govardhan. The resonant voice of devotional melody was stilled and there would be no more tears, no more poignant strains of separation from the Lord. But for hundreds of years these verses have continued to thrill the hearts and enrich the lives of millions with a deep devotional fervour.

Sur's literary fame rests on three major volumes of poetic compositions, *Sur-Saravali, Sachitya-Lahari* and last but not the least, *Sur-Sagar*. *Sur-Saravali* is reported, in contemporary writings, to have consisted of one lakh verses, but all these are not available; many of the verses have been lost to posterity due to obscurity and uncertainty of the times. Surdas has based *Sur-Sara vali* on the analogy of the game of *Holi* (Spring Colour Festival. The Lord is the Great Player who in His playful mood decides to creat the universe. He creates out of Himself the

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Primeval Man in whom appeared the three attributes of Nature—*Sattva, Rajas and Tamas*. Chronicling the various stages of the evolution of the universe, Sur then describes the twenty-four incarnations and the account is interspersed with the legends of Dhruva and Prahlada. From verse 360 onwards Sur gets ecstatic while narrating the story of the incarnation of Lord Krishna and the various sports connected with His life, and *Ras-Lila* (the group dance favourite with Krishna, his cowherds and the Gopis). From verse 1013 to 1017 there is enumeration of the various *Ragas* and *Raginis* and this is followed by a description of *Vasant* (Spring) and *Holi* festivals. The poet's expression gets inspired in his unique description of the Divine Couple (Radha and Krishna).

Sahitya-Lahari is a collection of Sur's verses remarkable for their emotional content and ornate expression. Although its 118 verses deal with various forms of poetic composition, yet the dominant note is that of *Bhakti* (Devotion). Some critics have been hard on Surdas, charging him with denigrating his devotional muse by extravagantly sensuous descriptions. However, Sur, as any one else might have done, wrote in the idiom of his age and in his devotional fervour and spiritual passion he soared far above the mundane considerations of critics and commentators. He raised full-throated melodious strains describing the multifarious sports of his deity. These descriptions are marked by simplicity, not sophistication, longing but not just, passion for drinking at the fount of divine beauty, but no sensuous infatuation. There is strange but deft admixture of the human and the divine in these intensely passionate descriptions.

Sur-Sagar is the most significant work of Surdas and marks the final consummation of his poetic art. Its main aim is to describe Lord Krishna's life. Surdas reflects on the role of Knowledge, of Renunciation, Forms of Devotion, Incarnations Divine Worship, Ritual etc. But in the latter part all his verses are a homage to Lord Krishna, describing His life and multiple sports. He is depicted as pervading the entire universe.

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He delights his mother in the garb of son; his friends, the cowherds in the garb of a comrade, Gopis in the garb of an aesthete. The whole Vraj is delighted and blessed with the various relationships he has established and is wrenched in pain and insufferable agony when Krishna decides to leave it. *Sur-Sagar* is the epitome of the entire Vraj life. The main topics dealt with are—Krishna's birth and childhood pranks, *Ras-Lila,* the Divine Flute, departure from Vraj, the end of Kamsa etc. With these are dovetailed stories and traditional legends—making it all an epic of spiritual faith and devotion. The exultation at his birth, the throb of the mother's heart, the frolics of friends, the tending of cows, the teasing of Gopis, the simple joys amongst the bounty of Nature, the loving complaints from neighbours, the unfolding of the profound and mystic love—all are feelingly described and these assume epic dimensions. Krishna's sport with Gopis, though delightful outwardly, represents an unparalleled tragedy. In the context of Uddhava-Gopis conversation, Surdas has introduced an element of poignant sorrow and here in the deep, silent and serene waters of *Sur-Sagar* are reflected the intensity of pain and the pangs of separation. The soft, tender verses throb here with weight and excitement of passionate sorrow.

Krishna Bhakti is the warp and woof of Surdas's poetry which embodies a whole gamut of emotions. For thousands of years Krishna's chronicle has been written and recited by manifold writers and poets, but it is rare to find anywhere else the happy marriage of emotion, imagination and beauty. Surdas has visualised in Lord Krishna a sport-loving friend of the cowherds, the Destroyer of *Asuras* (demons), the Saviour of devotees, the Imperishable, the Omnipresent and the Abode of Supreme Bliss. To this God has Surdas surrendered himself. The supernatural and celestial aspects of the Lord's personality get fused with the human aspects and the entire image is touched up with sensitive imagination and ardent emotion. Sur's descriptions are subtle, tender and lively. One has only to shuffle the pages of his writings to discover beautiful pictures of motherly tenderness,

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cunning conceits and frolics of childhood, the simplicity and picturesqueness or the idyllic setting which serves as a backdrop to the sports of child Krishna.

In the depiction of Radha, Surdas has scored over other writers on the subject, like Vidyapati and Chandidas in making her more vibrant, more profoundly attractive and more intensely youthful and by lending her greater depth and appeal. She longs for complete identification with the Lord, burns in the seething flames of separation, but has no complaint; her renunciation is lofty as the Himalayas, but is tempered with humility; her sense of duty is harder than flint, but her heart is tender as the morning dew. Being Krishna's childhood involvement, her love has grown with the years, and after separation from Krishna, she attains a quiet, spiritual dignity. She is in fact the Lord's own inner, inseparable, self-identifying power. Gopis are not represented as individuals, they are a composite entity, a multiple personality of Radha. In their anxious longing for full identification with the Lord, they attain the highest reaches of self-dedication. They accompany Him in the celebrations of *Vasant* (Spring) and *Holi* festivals and during Ras-Lila which brings about the socialization of their individual relations. *Ras-Lila* is Surdas's distinct artistic achievement. Under the magic spell of the music of the flute and dance, stones melted, the Yamuna ceased to flow and the moon stopped her onward journey in the sky ! *Ras-Lila* is raised to a spiritual level where love between the lover and the beloved is transformed into a mystical devotion. Gopis' love is ideal, it is not a sudden burst of passion. While ecstatically forgetful in His company, they are heart-broken in separation. In their pathetic plight, they despise the counsel of yoga from Uddhava, Krishna's courier. They provide the element of tragic pathos in the entire chronicle. Surdas has achieved great success in analyzing the emotion of the heart and stands at a high pedestal as a poet of pure emotions.

There is, in the works of Surdas, a happy blending of poetry and music and a strong and rich lyrical element. He has even

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appended to each one of his verses the name of the appropriate *Raga* or *Ragini* for singing them. In this poetic form there is considerable variety and innovation. He has embellished and embroidered his verses with richly coloured silken threads of deep devotion and sensitive imagination. He employed for his poetic creations, a form of Hindi called *Vraj Bhasha*. It has proved to be the best medium for interpreting the sweetest and subtlest emotions of the human heart. It is said to be the traditional poetic language for centuries, but it was given to Surdas to refine and enrich it, to introduce into it elements of suppleness and flexibility, subtlety and vitality. He was the first to harness the language for a literary role, and for 400 years in the north-west of India the whole gamut of emotions in Indian poetry—union and separation, joy and sorrow, love and devotion, found effective expression through this medium.

Surdas's contribution to the devotional life of his country and to the language, has to be viewed in the context of his times. *Bhakti* (devotion) to him is complete in itself; it is not a means, but the end, the ultimate fulfilment. His writings are watchwords, current phraseology, and are woven in the texture of the social life and speech of countless men and women. He lives in the hearts of millions and his life and writings will continue to inspire and enthuse people towards a spiritually dedicated and morally edifying way of life.

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NARASIMHA MEHTA

V. R. Trivedi

An amorphous vernacular becomes the language of a region distinct from other allied vernaculars, owing to many causes. These may be political, geographical or social. But the chief factor that gives it an identity, status and popularity as a possession of the people is the literary genius which makes it the vehicle of its inspiration and thought. Jnanadeva, more than any other poet of the medieval period, gave Marathi a firm foundation. The same can be said of Narasimha Metha. We cannot think of Gujarati as a distinct language of culture without thinking of Narasimha, Premananda, Govardhanram and Gandhiji.

And the dearest *bhajan* of Gandhiji was written by Narasimha : "Who is a true man of God ?" "Lo ! Him we call the man of the lord Omnipresent who experiences in himself the pain that another feels; who renders service to soothe another's distress; who does not impart into his mental texture pride of age or of deed.....

"Who venerates each one in every world ; who speaks ill of none; whose speech, whose senses and whose mind are kept under firm disciplines; blessed is the mother who gave birth to him. Him we call a *Vaishnava.* Whose ambitions have been abandoned; to whom all women not locked with him in marriage are as mother; whose tongue slips not to utter untruth; whose hand does not stretch forth to touch what is not his own; him we call a *Vaishnava.* In his pure self are, all the places of pilgrimage".

This is indeed a good poem of moral ardour and self-discipline and it is sanctified by Gandhiji the translator, so to say, of the poem in his life.

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But Narasimha's soaring expression of his mystical experience is to be found in other hymns. Here he is with the prophets. In a psalm of mystical rapture, Narasimha describes the awakening of the spirit. "When I am spiritually awakened, the world appears as naught. All appearance and enjoyment are as it were dreams. All this is the play of the Supreme. The various ornaments of gold are only name and form; gold is the reality. So is the Supreme Reality in relation to the world. Removed from the world of name and form, and from all inward oppositions, I am in a state of beautitude, lost in the Supreme."

In all this cosmos, Thou art but one,
Manifesting Thyself in diverse infinite forms.
Thou art the Spirit in bodies,
And the Light of light Thou art.
Uttering Thy word in the voiceless Deep.
Thou manifestest Thyself in the Vedas;
Thou art the wind, Thou art the water;
Thou art the Earth and the Holder of the same.
Thou hast blown Thyself in the form of trees,
All this manifested universe Thou hast created
Out of Thyself to enjoy the same in various ways;
Thou hast manifested Thyself as souls
For the same purpose.*

In another hymn in the same lofty strains Narasimha urges man to see for himself Krishna, the Divine Person, the ultimate all-embracing Reality in earth and sky, in water and fire, nay, in the entire cosmos. He is ineffable. There is nothing like Him. Only the lover could hold Him in love, and Narasimha would lay himself down at His lotus feet when dying. There is no other refuge. This is one of the noblest poems in Gujarati, com-

*Translation by Manilal C. Parekh.

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paring well with great utterances which sing of God's infinite glory and man's loving surrender:—

"What dost thou see in the sky, pervading it all ?
At the feet of the same Dark One, I desire to die,
For, there is none here who can be compared to Krishna.
My Lord's beauty is matchless and is such
As cannot be apprehended by my intellect.
Seeing him I can only lose myself in an endless festive season.
Holding fast with the bonds of love to the roots of eternal life.
We should know the entire cosmos
With all its bodies and spirits as but One spirit
Where millions of rising suns shine
With all their flaming glorious light,
Where the sky is ablaze with bright colour
As with a mantle of gold.
Sachchidananda is sporting in joy,
Swinging in a cradle of gold.
There is neither wick, nor oil, nor thread,
And yet burns bright everlastingly*.

Living in the holy land of Shree Krishna and Somnath, Narasimha lived and sang to his deity—the beloved Krishna—in the 15th century. Some scholars think that he flourished after Vallabhacharya but the traditionally accepted period of his life, 1414-1480 A.D., may be regarded as reasonably certain. The spiritually re-generating movement of *Bhakti* which started with the *Bhagavata* and Ramanuja, and which had its sources even earlier, had reached Gujarat long before Vallabhacharya, for the *Bhagavata* was used for translation and adaptation by Gujarati poets such as Bhima and Kesavadas in the 15th century.

Narasimha certainly knew Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda* and it is possible that he imbibed the cult of erotic mysticism from

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him. Not only the names of the Gopis mentioned by Narsimha, but the whole tone and rhythm of his language convey a reminiscence of Jayadeva. It is possible that Narasimha's dramatic or visualizing imagination drew vigour from Jayadeva. Narsimha's fondness for Marathi expressions—sometimes he utters whole sentences in Marathi in his poetic dialogue with his Lord—certainly indicates his familiarity with contemporary Marathi poetry. It may be presumed that Vallabhacharya gave a new shape to the cult of loving devotion by including the doctrine of grace in it and calling it *Pusti-marga* and not merely *Prema-marga,* the path of devotion through love which is implicit in Narasimha.

Pilgrims and shrines of worship knew no geographical bounds within *Bharatvarsha,* and the great philosophical and spiritual movements of Sankara and Ramanuja soon took possession of the heart of the whole of Hindustan. The metaphysical and religious synthesis of the teachings of Sankara and Ramanuja, of transcendentalism and *Maya* on the one hand and qualified non-dualism and *Lila* (Sport) on the other, of Knowledge and Devotion, was the chief character of the religious revival of early medieval period (1200-1600). The metaphysical non-duality of the Absolute is no bar to mystical union of the individual conceived as Gopi, with the beloved Lord, Sri Krishna through blissful love and utter self-surrender.

It is the measure of Narasimha's popularity as a devotee and poet that the language of many of his poems has lost its archaic character. In fact, the language of Narasimha and Mirabai (1499-1547) was nearly the same—a late form of old Gujarati. Gujarati and Marwadi became distinct languages only around 1650 A.D. And yet in the less popular poems of Narasimha, the old idiom could be discerned and perhaps the old form of all his poems can be reconstructed by scholars. But that will be for academic value and satisfaction.

But the original linguistic and metrical character of Narasimha's work has a cultural significance; it establishes it as a link between the *rasa* and *phagu* of the early period and the

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latter day *akhyan* of Bhalan and Nakar. Chronologically, therefore, Narasimha is certainly not the first Gujarati poet but he is esteemed as the father of Gujarati poetry. In saintly character and personal influence, in the gusto of his devotional enthusiasm, in the assonance and wealth of his diction, and in poetic imagination, he had no equal in Gujarat for centuries. Once the metaphysical and religious position, that in the ultimate union with the Divine Person, Krishna, the Supreme Lord of the Universe, is the salvation for which the individual soul, somehow separated from the Lord, hankers, and that in the ultimate state the individual personality of men, even in the state of blissful union, is retained and accepted, only the dramatic imagination of the seeker such as Jayadeva or Narasimha, is needed for his spiritual assimilation to Radha or the Gopi. Such a psychological shift is noticeable in Semitic and Christian mysticism also. Jesus Christ compares the seekers after God to virgins looking for the bridegroom. A similar relationship was conceived between the Church and Jesus himself by St. Paul. St. Bernard, a heroic leader says : "The love of God and the soul can be expressed in no way so perfectly as by the mutual love of bride and bridegroom, all being in common between them, and neither having any separate possessions". Erotic love being the highest form of personal love, it is easily transformed to the sphere of religious fervour, in which the devotee seeks the Lord, the Cosmic Lover, as his beloved. This might be the psychological explanation of erotic mysticism, which, one must remember is not confined to India or to Hinduism. Of course, from a social and moral standpoint, this was a very vulnerable attitude, and actually led to aberration and perversion, but with the best devotee, the love of beloved Krishna-Radha or her associate Gopi acted as a catharsis and sublimation of the sexual instinct. The courage, nobility and humanity of saints like Narasimha, Surdas, Chaitanya and Sahajananda belie any other supposition.

As in the case of so many other seers and saints of India the life of Narasimha is enveloped in the mist of legend and

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miracle. The Indian mind fondly believes in the extraordinary character of the life of the saint and often invests it with trials and tribulations from which the miraculous intervention of providence should relieve him. From the mass of legend it is difficult to get at the real facts of Narasimha's life. All poets, and especially the lyrical poets, are autobiographical spiritually, but Narasimha is authobiographical in the usual sense. In some of his narrative lyrics he has described how Krishna himself intervened in some marvellous manner to save his honour at a critical juncture. In his *Harmata* including *Har Same-na-Pada* (1456) he narrates the ordeal in which the king had required him to prove his *bona fides* as a *bhakta* by some positive evidence of God's grace. The miracle happens and Narasimha receives the Deity's garland. The poem has many interpolations, but the original has been ascertained by Pandit K. K. Shastri. The bold familiarity of his address to God, the volubility of his diction, the rush of his rhythm and the easy use of Marathi phraseology are evidence of its authenticity. In one *pada* he reminds his Lord of his gracious help on former occasions of trial and distress—

"You are no Master, nor am I your favoured servant, if King Mandlik can persecute me. People abuse me as a greedy, lascivious hypocrite, not a true devotee of yours. If you are truly my master, come to my aid as you did at the time of my daughter's *Mameru**. Surely you are not deaf in my case simply because I happen to be a *Nagar,* for you have been gracious to men of low birth like Namadeva and Kabir. How could you hope to live in peace in Heaven, or in Virndavan with Radha, without me as your gay associate!"

The other authentic autobiographical poems are *Mamerun, Shamalsha-no-Vivaha* and *Hundi.* These and some other lyrics help us in gathering some facts of the poet's life, what-

*Ceremonial gift of ornaments and clothes given at the time of the first pregnancy of the daughter.

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ever may be the rational explanation of God's assistance in each case. That the dramatic and empathetic imagination of Narasimha might have coloured what might only be the timely assistance of devoted patrons cannot be ruled out.

Narasimha, by caste a *Nagar Brahmin,* was born at Talaja, a village near Junagadh, in Saurashtra, Gujarat. He lost his father early and was under the care of his elder brother and his wife. And we know what it generally means for the dependent in a Hindu joint family. As a sensitive boy he must have sought the company of itinerant devotees of various deities whose songs must have given him solace and fired his poetic imagination. His poetic career leaves the impression of a man of culture who had discarded the ways of the world for a higher fulfilment. It is very probable his career as a poet and a *bhakta* began in his association with the wandering and singing *sadhus.* It was in their company probably that he had the vision of *Rasalila,* the dance of Krishna with Gopis, wherein he himself had the privilege of holding the torch. This mystical experience or imaginative realization when he was probably fifteen, set the seal on his career as a man of God, and he turned his back on the world. He now had a separate home in Junagadh where he lived with his wife, Manekbai, whom he had married when she was quite young. He had by her a daughter Kunvarbai, and a son, Shamal. He lived in Junagadh for the greater part of his life. Men and women gathered round him and joined him in the worship of Krishna, singing in chorus his lyrics of love and devotion. They looked to his earthly needs as far as they could, the poet always having faith in God's bounty. God helped him beyond the expectation of his community at the ceremony of the first pregnancy of his daughter and also when his son married. God saw that his *hundi* (cheque) drawn on the deity at Dwaraka was honoured. And he rescued him in the great ordeal imposed by Ra Mandlik, the king of Junagadh. Even so he had his share of grief, ridicule, vilification and opprobrium.

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His wife and son died and his daughter became a widow. He left Junagadh and passed the last fifteen years of his life in Mangrol near Junagadh. His humility, his association with the lowly, even the untouchables, and with women devotees of Krishna scandalized the *Nagars,* a community known for its culture, prudence and conformity to social convention. Narasimha was decried as a debauchee and a cheat. But he did not shrink. He continued all his life to preach patience, humility, amity, equal compassion for all God's creatures, self-restraint and absolute attachment to Lord Krishna.

The autobiographical poems and *Sudama Charit*a and also some narrative lyrics reveal the poet's power of picturesque narration and realistic rendering of humorous and dramatic situations, his riotous fancy and verbal artistry. He carries forward the earlier tradition of narrative writing in separate lyrics loosely connected with one another. He uses the *Zulana* metre as a rule. His technique, while making the narration somewhat halting, leaves ample room for the delineation of various moods and minor incidents. Every lyric then can stand by itself. In almost every modern Indian language the revival of *Bhakti* was followed by *pauranik akhyana.* In Narasimha we find both together. It can fairly be maintained that he was the father of the *Gujarati akhyana,* though his *akhyana* is more lyrical in form and substance, than the later *akhyanas.* Two poems, *Govinda Gaman* and *Surata Samgrama,* though striking in their own way, may not be Narasimha's. The first describes the departure of Krishna from Gokul to Mathura and the Gopis' prayers, exhortations and tricks to prevent it. The second describes a sportful 'battle' between Krishna and his cowherd friends on one side and Radha and her female associates on the other. Both poems are noteworthy for their creative fancy, wit and vigour. But modern scholarship has regarded them as literary forgeries. It is quite likely that, as in the case of Kabir and Mira, many spurious additions were made in his other works by later poets with a view to securing popularity in Narasimha's holy name.

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The genuine *Padas* in the other collections of his poems are substantial in volume. Their themes are *Krishnalila,* the sport of Krishna as a child, boy and youth, loving devotion and sport of Gopis, and mystical realization through knowledge of the Supreme. The last group of poems has been widely acclaimed. As poems of mystical transport, they achieve a rare perfection. They were probably written in old age when the poet's youthful effusiveness of passion had yielded place to beautiful and glorious contemplation.

The *Krishnalila padas* are found in different collections. They are *Krishnajanma, Balalila, Vasanta, Hindola, Chaturi, Rasa* and *Sringara.* The poet has employed various metrical forms to suit the mode or theme of the lyrics. Some of these could be set to classical tunes, while some others could be adapted to the *Garba* dance. Narasimha's *Zulana* metre, however, is his *forte* and his chief contribution to the metrical equipment of Gujarati. To this day it has remained a favourite metre with the poets, being used as a flexible instrument for narrative, descriptive and reflective poetry as well as the purely lyrical.

The opulence of Narasimha's diction and imagery is in evidence in all these poems. For the evocation of sentiments of loving ardour, and the filial affection, he selects familiar incidents in the life of Krishna or invents them, and his creative genius lends charm, grace and wonder to them. His imagery is profuse and it shows his love of nature and knowledge of human relations. Poetic vitality never fails him. Lustre, sonority and vigour pervade all his poetry. It has the freshness of a morning in spring—lovely, ardent and playful, the blooming flowers and the warbling birds linking earth to heaven.

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MIRA

Anantrai Raval

Mira is one of the brightest stars in the galaxy of the immortal poets and mystics of India, not only of the medieval age but of all time. There have been poetesses of a high order and also God-intoxicated saints and mystics amongst women, but a combination of the two in one person, and that too, a lady of royal blood as Mira, has few parallels in the world. Another significant thing about her is that she is, with legitimate pride, claimed in equal measure by Rajasthan, Gujarat and northern India as belonging to them. This is because each of the three languages, Rajasthani, Gujarati and Vraj-Hindi have been enriched by the poems composed by her. This is explained by the fact that though Mira was Rajasthani by birth and passed the first half of her life in Rajasthan, she happened to live in Vrindavan in the east and Dwaraka in the west in the latter years of her life.

We have always been indifferent or apathetic to the history of the mundane life, of the great figures in our history. This has made it almost impossible for us to have an authentic account of most of our saints, mystics and poets. We have only popular anecdotes woven round them and passed on piously from generation to generation. Mira is no exception to this. All that has come down to us is the semi-historical anecdotes regarding her emphasising her unflinching devotion to God and her miraculous escapes from fatal persecution at the hands of her royal relatives, particularly the Rana of Udaipur, her brother-in-law. As to the exact period of her life, Colonel Todd's finding that she was the daughter of Rao Dudaji of the Rathod family of Medta, a small principality in Marwad in Rajasthan, and was married

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to Rana Kumbha of Chitod, held ground for some years, fixing 1403—1470 A.D. as her date. But further research by a number of scholars has made it possible to arrive at an agreed conclusion which fixes 1498 A.D. as Mira's birth-year and describes her not as the daughter but grand-daughter of Rao Dudaji, married to Prince Bhojraj, the heir-apparent Sangramsinh of Chitod, better known by his abbreviated name Sang or Sanga. Mira who lost her mother in early childhood was brought up by her grandfather, a devout Vaishnava from whom she obviously imbibed in her impressionable early years her love for Sri Krishna, which was to be reinforced and transformed into intense devotion and dedication as she grew up. Wedded to the Krishna idol gifted to her by a sadhu in her childhood, she probably was a listless spouse to Prince Bhojraj, who died early after a few years of his marriage with Mira. Early widowhood drew Mira further and unflinchingly to her Girdharilal, Lord Krishna, the supporter of mount Govardhan. The rest of her life is the story of her intense devotion to the Lord of her heart amidst and in spite of the dislike of the close relatives of her deceased husband for her bhakti way of life spent in *Bhajan-Kirtan* and in the association with birds of the same feather.

No persuasion, no calumny, no persecution would turn her away from her exclusive devotion and surrender to Him. Short-lived Ratnasinh and Vikramaditya, the two younger brothers of Mira's husband Bhojraj, who succeeded to the throne when Rana Sang, their father died in 1528, the former in 1528 and the latter in 1532 A.D., are said to have subjected Mira to harsh persecution. Obviously, they thought that the sort of life led by Mira did not befit a would-have-been queen and a worthy inmate of the royal palace as she was. There are references to various attempts successively made by the young rulers to put an end to her life when they found that their attempts to mend her life were of no avail. They were rendered unsuccessful by the benign protection of her Lord. The serpent sent to Mira under the cover of flowers for worship turned into *saligram* at

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the touch of Mira on one occasion, and deadly poison into harmless potion on another. On one occasion hearing the sound of a male voice from the chamber of Mira the Rana forced the door to be opened but found therein only Mira and the Krishna idol. There is also a popular tale of the Rana rushing into the parlour of Mira, sword in hand, obviously to kill her, and returning awe-struck at finding not one but four identical Miras in front of him.

Finding the palace atmosphere of Chitod uncongenial to the exclusive and undisturbed pursuit of her faith, Mira left Mewad soon after 1532 and after passing some time at Medta, her maternal place, made a move to Vrindavan, which had then assumed the hallow of a holy place of pilgrimage for Krishna-lovers from all over the country. There is an interesting anecdote about Mira's first meeting with Jiva Goswami, a disciple of Sri Chaitanya, in Vrindavan. The Goswami at first declined to see her as she was a woman. Mira's retort that she was amused to find his sex-consciousness intact in such a blessed place where all lovers of Sri Krishna should be expected to feel and live as the Gopis, the cowherdesses of Gokul dedicated to the Divine Lover Krishna, made him relent and change his stance. After a stay of fair duration in the holy land blessed with the dust of the feet of her Lord, Mira, wishing to pass the rest of her life in Dwaraka, which Sri Krishna had chosen as his capital, went there. It is safe to assume that she spent quite a number of years in Dwaraka in peaceful dedication to God.

The popular story about the end of her mortal frame runs like this. Mewad was having one trouble after other, after her departure. Vikramaditya, her persecutor, having been murdered, Mewad was ruled by an upstart Vanveer for a short while before Udesinh, the younger brother of Vikramaditya, defeated him and regained the throne. Very soon, Mewad was afflicted by a drought. Such hardships were attributed to the displeasure of God at the treatment meted out to Bhakta Mira, whose return to the God-forsaken land was thought of as the only remedy. The

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small band of Brahmins sent by the considerate young Rana Udesinh to Dwaraka to implore her to return to Mewad having failed, they resorted to fasting by way of righteous pressure to persuade her to return. This moved compassionate Mira to approach the holy icon of the Lord of Dwaraka in the temple for His will and permission and as the faithful ones believe, Mira's physical frame was absorbed in the idol, to the bewilderment and despair of the waiting Brahmins. This happened some time in the year 1546.

This story has given rise to a theory put forward by some later biographers of Mira that she did not like to return to the land which she had once left to worship her Lord without any distraction or disturbance, and so she left Dwaraka abruptly, unnoticed by the Brahmins, whereafter she lived for many years in holy places in the south and in the north, in silent oblivision. This makes it possible to accommodate the popular belief about the meeting of Mira with Tansen, emperor Akbar and Tulsidas in her later life. This theory gives Mira a life-span of about seven decades and a natural death at a ripe old age. It is, however, no more than a reasonable piece of guess-work.

Efforts have been made by scholars to find out whether 'Mira' was the real name of this renowned devotional poetess of Rajasthan or whether it could be a pen-name. Some who are inclined to believe in the pen-name theory suspect the word 'Mira' to be of foreign (to be exact, Arabic) origin like 'Kabir', the name of the famous mystic poet. But then, they have not been able to ascertain the real name of Mira. There have also been discussions amongst scholars as to the influence of Chaitanya and Vallabhacharya and their Bhakti cults on her and her poetry through her stay in Vrindavan and her constant contact with *bhajan-kirtan mandalis*. True, Mira excels in *Prema-lakshana Bhakti* and *madhura bhava* so highly eulogized by Chaitanya and Vallabhacharya, the propounders of this form of Vaishnava Bhakti cult, but all her devotional poetry is marked by a

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distinct voice of her own and does not show any sectarian colour or approach. As a poetess, she seems to be the product of her own intense devotion for God : she may be her own creation for all we know. Some songs of hers like *jogi mat ja, mat ja, mat ja* have led some scholars to jump at a guess that she might have come into closer contact with some ascetic (*jogi*) of Nath sect in her early life and developed some romantic attachment to him and his way of life. But in all probability, she might have addressed her Krishna symbolically as a *jogi*. Some words and lines in her poem *jo tum todo piya main nahi todun* echo those of the devotional song of Raidas *prabhuji tum chandan ham pani* which may be accounted for as the influence of contemporary and earlier devotional literature which she might have listened to.

Some of the incidents of her life referred to above are reconstructed from those alluded to by her in a good many of her autobiographical poems. It is possible that popular stories about Mira might have given rise to such poems, some of which might not be the genuine creation of Mira. They might have been composed by some later well-meaning admirers and passed off as Mira's, by the easy medieval contrivance of inserting the name of Mira in the last line signifying her authorship. But there is no mistaking about the genuine compositions of Mira, and there is a good number of them. Whatever her mundane outer life, her inner one is unreservedly depicted in her devotional poetry which comes to her most easily. It is her natural expression, something like the spontaneous outburst of her powerful longing for the Divine. Poetic utterance became the part and parcel of her sadhana, so much so that we could say of her : she lisped in lyrics and the lyrics came. Yes, Her poetic genius is essentially that of a poet of lyrical genius. It is through a *pada* (song) that Mira seeks to reach God. The words of her *padas* do not merely record the experience of God. They become an inherent part of it and sometimes even cause it to take place. She experiences God in her songs, which act as a bridge joining God and the God-possessed mystic poetess in her.

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And what sort of an image of Mira do we find emerging from her lyrics? Succinctly put, it is that of a Gopi of Vraj, once blessed with the bliss of communion with Krishna in Vrindavan and Gokul, finding herself stranded in the arid land of Rajasthan in the immensity of ages and space, pining for what is lost, a veritable eternal thirst for God incarnate. Nothing is real in this world for her God-sick being, except God and separation from Him, the exquisite pang of separation from him which she has repeatedly and with rising levels of intensity given utterance to in lines like the following :—

1. Oh, what a love-lorn soul I am ! Nobody has any idea of what pain I feel.
2. I have become pale and emaciated for my Divine Lover : they do not know my inner disease.
3. I cannot afford to live without Him.
4. O Papiha, don't you utter *piyu, piyu.*
5. I have forsaken all comforts. Why do you keep me waiting and pining for you ?
6. Oh you, my companion in birth and death, I simply can't forget you day and night.
7. Oh Flute-player, hurry up to my place.
8. Oh, Belover, come and bless me with your *darshan* (sight) : : Simply cannot live without you.

The *Bhagavata Purana* puts these words in the mouth of the Gopis to whom Sri Krishna becomes invisible for a short time : 'A tiny moment without your presence becomes tiringly long'. Mira's utterances of the pang of separation from her Lord are no less poignant. In many a lyric she prays to Him in words like the following :—

1. Please bestow your attention to this request of mine.

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2. Poor Mira has been waiting and waiting.
3. Make me your true maid-servant, my Lord.
4. There is a conflagration on the mountain-rib what to do, O Khana?
5. God, redeem me when you feel you must.
6. Now I seek shelter at your feet : keep me, oh Merciful.
7. O you kind one, please hear my supplication.
8. I beseech you, Lord, kindly take my boat across, (the river or sea of life) safely.

Hyper-responsive as God is, He cannot but grant the requests of those who implore Him for His abounding grace. Mira's prayers are granted, and Mira finds occasions to express joyfully the bliss of union with the Lord in words like the following, dancing with spiritual delight :—

1. My prayed one has blessed my house today.
2. O friend, I am intoxicated with the pleasure of Girdhar.
3. I am in tune with the Infinite : my yearning has been satisfied.
4. It has been raining profusely : He has played in my house (heart) today.

The ideal of *Prema-Lakshana Bhakti* like the Gopis of Vraj, Mira gives verbal expression to the intense longing of her spirit for the Divine and the bliss of her communion with Him in a language couched in the diction of human love. Barring the silence of ecstasy, it is the only type of expression that comes nearer the correct description of the spiritual experience of the Bhakta, as has been shown by similar expressions by St. Teresa, the Sufis and Vaishnava poets like Jayadev and Vidyapati, and mystics like Kabir, Narasimha Mehta and many others. But Mira stands distinguished in the lot in the natural modesty and grace of a

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woman. Men-poets had to assume the spirit of a Gopi : for Mira, a woman totally dedicated to her Girdharlal, it was natural. That is why her treatment of love for the Divine never appears out of the way, observing as it does the sense of decorum and restraint, without impairing intensity of the emotion. That is why she is quite at home while delineating the emotions of the Gopis of Vraj and Yasoda, the mother of Krishna, in her lyrics on Krishna-leela, and her own love for Krishna in many of her autobiographical lyrics in words like :—

1. My love for Him hails from previous births, Ranaji, I am helpless.
2. My mind has been pierced, O Rana.
3. I would not abide by your behest now, Rana; I have secured Girdhari as my bridegroom.
4. I will dance, singing the greatness of Hari.
5. For me there is only Girdhar Gopal, no one else.
6. I am married to an immortal husband, O friend.
7. I have been fascinated by your charming face, O Mohan!

She has also written a number of didactic lyrics, admonishing the world-minded ones to turn Godward, in poems beginning with lines like the following :—

1. Oh mind, touch the feet of Hari.
2. Don't you utter, don't you utter, don't you utter anything else than the name of Radha-Krishna.
3. Such a birth in human frame may not be repeated.
4. Once you take to a life of renunciation, what is the point of gloominess ?

Mira seems to have been a gifted singer with a fine sense of music and melody. The rich variety of *ragas* that we find in her

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lyrics is a sure proof of it. It has, along with the intense devotional content and the lucid poetic expression thereof, ensured the oral transmission of her lyrics in the last four centuries from generation to generation in Gujarat, Rajasthan and north India, and their never-dying popularity with musicians. We know how gifted musicians like Dilip Kumar Roy, Juthika Ray, Pandit Omkarnath, Smt. Subbulakshmi and Lata Mangeshkar have set to exquisite music some of the famous *bhajans* of Mira and honoured them by lending them their voice, enhancing their popularity and longevity for times to come.

Mira takes her place in the front rank of the Indian mystics and bhaktas like Jnaneswar, Nanak, Kabir, Narasimha Mehta, Tukaram, Ramdas and others. She was a devout Krishna-bhakta first and last, comparable to St. Teresa and Rabia in her love of God and the poetry that came to her as a means of expressing her love of God. From the point of view of poetry of high lyrical order and intensity of passion she can be favourably compared to the Greek poetess Sappho. But Mira's songs are much more than all these. Equally rich in devotional fervour, poetic expression and tuneful music, her songs penetrate into the recesses of our hearts. They are the gems of immortal lustre in the treasure-house of the devotional poetry of Rajasthan, Gujarat and north India.

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RUPA GOSWAMIN

Siddheswara Bhattacharya

Sarvajna Jagadguru was the prince of Karnataka, a high-born Brahmin of Bharadvaja Gotra, having equal command over the three Vedas. His son Aniruddha was only next to the father by virtue of his profound depth in the *Yajurveda*. Aniruddha had a couple of sons. Rupesvara and Harihara. Padmanabha was the son of Rupesvara. Like his grand-father, Aniruddha, he was well-versed in the *Yajurveda* and had, in addition, sound knowledge of the *Upanishads*.

From the distant land of Karnataka, Padmanabha migrated to Bengal and became a domicile of Navahatta (Naihati) in the 24-Parganas. That was at the end of the fourteenth century or the beginning of the fifteenth. He attracted there the attention of the public by the performance of a sacrifice. So he translated his knowledge of the *Yajurveda* into practice.

Padmanabha had five sons. Mukunda being the youngest. As a result of family quarrels, he migrated to Jessore and settled there. Kumara was the son of Mukunda. He was the father of several sons including the last three—Sanatana, Rupa and Anupama.

By extraordinary talents and scholarship, Sanatana and Rupa occupied exalted positions at the court of the Nawab of Gauda. Sanatana became the *Mahamantri* and the Nawab honoured him with the title *Saker Malik*. Rupa also was appointed a high official with the designation—*Dabir Khas*. At the vicinity of Gauda the three brothers settled at the village Rama-keli. Thus the journey from Karnataka through Navahatta and Jessore came to a halt for the time being.

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In the face of association with the Moslems, the Sanatana family was extremely anxious to keep up its high Brahmanic tradition and practices by maintaining contacts with the Vaishnavas of Navadvipa. It was a day of liberation when the resonance of *khola* and *karatala* that accompanied the religious procession of Sri Chaitanya penetrated the solitary gloom of the far off village, Rama-keli. The three souls were saved by absolute surrender to the feet of the *Mahaprabhu*. His divine touch turned their metal into gold. They broke through the egotistic shell to glide into infinite bliss, Bhagavan Sri Krishna. Their onward march to spiritual life began. The barriers of household life were all gone, and gone for ever.

The presence of Sri Chaitanya at Rama-keli was very brief. Rupa and Anupama ran to Allahabad to be blessed again with the presence of Sri Chaitanya. The *Mahaprabhu* directed them to proceed to Vrindavana. Sanatana met the Lord at Varanasi. He also was directed to Vrindavana. Having visited Vrindavana, Rupa and Anupama started for Puri where the Lord was resting at the time. But Anupama died on the way. Rupa stayed with the Lord for ten days at Puri and then returned to Vrindavana to live there for good. Sanatana followed suit. He also visited the Lord from Vrindavana to Puri to return shortly to Vrindavana again. Like Rupa, he also settled in Vrindavana for life.

At Vrindavana, Sri Jiva, the promising young son of the deceased brother, Anupama, joined Sanatana and Rupa. The great triad built up the school in which there was a confluence of heart and head, that came to be known in history as the Bengal school of Vaishnavism. In this laudable task, three other great souls contributed their share. Of these, Raghunatha Bhatta, though wrote nothing, imparted a new tone to the devotional atmosphere. Gopala Bhatta, a south Indian Brahmin, codified religious practices of the new school in his *Haribhaktivilasa*. Raghunatha Bhatta produced compositions, pure poetry and also mixed with prose, to express his excellent spirit of devotion.

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Thus, the six Goswamins of Vrindavana laid the foundation of a New Vaishnava School. Religion and ethics, metaphysical background, the unique cult of devotion with elaborate ritualistic practices were furnished by the six Goswamins. Of these, the two brothers and their nephew—Sanatana, Rupa and Jiva—are most conspicuous by the wealth of their contribution. Of the three again, Sanatana laid the spark. Rupa fanned it into flame while Jiva diffused it in all directions. The foundation was laid by Sanatana, Rupa built up the superstructure while Jiva gave it the finishing touch with extensions wherever necessary. Rupa is really the master architect of the Bengal School of Vaishnavism.

The flourishing period of Rupa was between 1533 and 1550. Rupa and Sanatana died in 1554 at an interval of a few months.

The earliest work of Rupa was the *Padyavali,* an anthology of 386 verses covering 126 authors, both old and new, all devoted to *Krishnalila.* It is a collection surveying different aspects of the sentiment of devotion. Then comes the *Dana-keli-kaumudi,* an one-Act play (*Bhanika*) of the *Uparupaka* type. Composed in 1495 and consisting of erotic dialogues in prose and verse, it describes the life of Sri Krishna through songs and dances. The composition is an example of grace and refinement. Then come the two lyric poems—the *Hamsa-duta* and the *Uddhava-sandesa.* In the *Hamsa-duta,* Lalita, a girl friend of Radhika, sends a swan to Mathura to communicate to Sri Hari Radha's pangs of separation ; it is in the *Sikharini* metre. The *Uddhava-sandesa* in *Mandakranta* metre conveys the message of Sri Krishna from Mathura to Radha at Vrindavana. The two lyrics were inspired by Kalidasa's *Meghaduta* and are remarkable for their grace and elegance. Then come four allied compositions—*Ashtadasachhandas, Utkalikavallari* (1550 A.D.), *Govindaviruda vali* and *Premendusagara,* all collected by Sri Jiva Goswamin under the title *Stavamala.* It consists of 64 pieces of hymns (*stotras*) and eulogistic songs (*virudas*). The hymns are in eight verses, each in short

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lyrical syllabic metres. The songs are rhythmic and lyrical in verse and prose. Devoted to the life of Sri Krishna at Vrindavana and Mathura, the *Stavamala* is an excellent specimen of *bhaktirasa,* pictorial fancy, lyrical quality, rhythm and alliteration, illustrating 49 varieties of metre. Next to these are two illustrious plays the *Vidagdhamadhava* and the *Lalitamadhava* composed in 1533 and 1537 respectively. The *Vidagdhamadhava,* a seven-act play, embraces the entire *Vrindavana-lila* and delineates *Sringararasa* from *Purvaraga* to the first union of Radhika with Sri Krishna. The Lalitamadhava, a ten-act play, has a complicated theme and plot and deals with mature union with equal prominence of *vipralambha sringara.* These two notable compositions were matched by another couple of works, the *Bhaktirasa-amritasindhu* and the *Ujjvalanilamani,* composed in 1541 and a little later respectively. The delicacies of emotional experiences found in the two plays are here hardened into scholastic theories, providing the metaphysical, logical and psychological foundation of the Bengal School of Vaishnavism. This brought into existence his *Natakachandrika,* a work on dramaturgy. Besides, Rupa composed works on theology—the *Laghu Bhagavatamrita,* Krishna janmatithividhi and the Ashta kalika-slokavali. Like the *Natakachandrika,* he composed the *Virudalaksana* to define the metrical technique of his eulogistic songs on Krishna. He has miscellaneous works to his credit as well—*Sriganoddesadipika* (1550 AD), large and small, and the *Prayuktakhyata Chandrika* (a grammar book).

The Krishna cult coupled with erotic mysticism springs directly from the *Srimad Bhagavata.* But here the dalliances of Krishna are with the Gopis. Only a particular Gopi enjoys Krishna's special favour and is identified as Sri Radha. Among the Vaishnava sects, those of Nimbarka and Vallabha also adopted Sri Radha. Jayadeva and Lilasuka were immersed in the poems and songs on the sports of Radha and Krishna. Badu Chandidasa revelled in detailed descriptions of the love of Radha and Krishna. Thus through poet-devotees the Radha-Krishna cult grew in

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strength, and was solidified into theories by arduous efforts of the sectarian theologians.

The sixteenth century witnessed a renaissance in Bengal in different directions. *Tantricism* involving women for religious purposes was preached by Krishnananda Agamavagisa in his *Tantrasara.* Allied to this, arose *Sahajiya* cult, the doctrine of naturalism that sought salvation in and through senses. The then Vaishnavism drank deep at the fountain of this thought-current with the result the common devotee began to take the help of woman to symbolise his devotional aspirations. Somehow he thought himself to be Krishna and his woman, Gopi and sought to realise divine love through sensuous behaviour. The episode of Chandidasa and the widow-washerwoman is an example on this point. All this meant that ideal *Krishnalila* so far confined to Radha alone, was sought to be realized in the life of common man by means of imitation. It was meant to be the reproduction of divine love in and through common man in terms of his behaviour towards an ordinary woman.

On the other hand stoic asceticism mingled with mysticism had originated from Sridhara, the noted commentator of the *Srimad Bhagavata.* Chaitanya's *sannyasa guru,* Kesava Bharati and *diksha guru,* Isvara Puri who initiated Chaitanya at Gaya both belonged to the Advaita sects of Acharya Sankara. Isvara Puri was the disciple of Madhavendra Puri who is held as the first pioneer of Vaishnavism in Bengal. Madhavendra had great enthusiasm for the secret sites of Vrindavana and Isvara Puri was an emotional mystic entering trance during *Krishna kirtana.*

Nursed in the tradition obtainable in the sixteenth century Bengal and inspired by the living contacts of the then spiritual stalwarts like Isvara Puri and Kesava Bharati, Sri Chaitanya exhibited the following traits :

(a) new spirit of emotionalism in lieu of traditional piety,

(b) emotional appeal to *Krishna kirtana.*

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(c) passion of Radha and Krishna,

(d) catholic and simple idea of worship,

(e) fancy for Vrindavana settlement, and,

(f) winning over scholars.

Among the stalwarts to come under the sway of Sri Chaitanya, the name of Rupa stands out with remarkable eminence. As already indicated, Rupa hailed from a Brahmin family of great social status, that was both learned and had performed many sacrifices. But the sense of pollution by association with the Moslems prompted the three brothers to develop fascination for Vaishnavism, as a gospel of liberation. Inspired by the Vaishnavism of Navadvipa, young Rupa wanted to have first-hand acquaintance of Vaishnavism through the ages in all its delicate shades. The result was the compilation of the *Padyavali,* the anthology of verses. The selection was allowed to soak into his being. His talent bloomed to give vent to his devotional feelings. Rupa was both a poet and a scholar. The creative artist knit into existence a tiny play, the *Danakeli kaumudi,* on Sri Krishna. He was aware that drama had direct appeal and so the most suitable medium of communication. His natural gift of lyrical vein then found expression in the lyrics, the *Hamsa-duta* and the *Uddhava-sandesa.* His romantic mind thus crossed the river Yamuna from Vrindavana to Mathura and then swam back the same river from Mathura to Virendavana. Apparently his mind in its anxiety to have the fuller view of Krishna was oscillating between the two points—Vrindavana and Mathura. His creative genius now began to take greater strides. As a result came into existence the four other compositions—*Ashtadasa chhandas, Utkalikavallari, Govindavirudavali* and *Premendu sagara.* They are excellent specimens of devotional poetry and prose, revealing at the same time melody and rhyme, ecstasy of alliteration and invention of new metres. They are attempts to perfect the poetic technique to suit the rhythmic expression of devotional joy.

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All these happened before Rupa met Chaitanya. By the magic touch of the *Mahaprabhu,* the mind and body of Rupa became settled in Vrindavana for ever. The enthusiasm of Sri Chaitanya for Vrindavana, which he had imbibed from his great spiritual teacher Madhavendra Puri, was transfused in Rupa. Thus settled in Vrindavana the poetic mind of Rupa dived deeper to reach the mystery land which forged compromise between poetic sentiment and high devotion. Rupa composed a couple of plays each of pretty long dimension, in which the *sringara* of *Radha-Krishna lila* at Vrindavana, in all its delicate shades unfolded itself. As *sringara,* it was an aesthetic sentiment; as divine love it was the climax of refined devotion. To make this novel experience a common cause, he chose the dramatic form as the vehicle of communication. But Rupa was a conscious artist. To accommodate the novelties invented in these literary media, he laid down new norms in dramatic technique in his *Nataka chandrika*. Thus the poet and dramaturgist in him worked in perfect harmony.

But the rationale of the equation *sringara*-devotion had to be provided for acceptance by the rational mind. Rupa therefore composed his monumental work, the *Bhakti-rasamrita sindhu* which not only furnished the logic of the equation but also developed it into full-fledged system with all its possible implications. Having justified the equation, he then set his hand to the *Ujjvala-nilamani* where the *sringara* between Radha and Krishna with all picturesque details crystallised into divine love, the *summum bonum* of a devotee. The two works are therefore complimentary.

From the devotional point of view, Radha was the devotee and Krishna was the object of devotion. This situation implies dualism between the subject and object of devotion. On the other hand, the union of Radha and Krishna means perfect coalescence, a unique type of non-duality. How could the two be reconciled ? In other words, the *advaita* strain of Acharya Sankara, handed down to Sri Chaitanya by Kesava Bharati and

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Isvara Puri, came in direct conflict with the duality of devotionalism. The answer was *bhedabheda vada,* the theory of peaceful co-existence of difference and unity. It was a-logical as it was purely a mystic reality to be realised and not to be argued upon (*achintya*).

The genius of Rupa shed light on Vaishnava theology and even grammar. They are also of importance.

Contacts of Rupa with Sri Chaitanya were few and far between and they were shortlived. But while Sanatana and Rupa had some contacts with Sri Chaitanya, their nephew Jiva had none at all. Thus they cannot be said to have benefitted much from long and intense personal associations with Sri Chaitanya. They could not have derived much from the writings of Sri Chaitanya either. For, Sri Chaitanya wrote precious little. Under the circumstances, what they obtained from Sri Chaitanya was general inspiration. The edifice of *Gaudiya Vaishnavism* was therefore largely the contribution of their scholastic and devout genius. But that genius was undoubtedly kindled by the magnetic influence of Sri Chaitanya. Of all the six Goswamins of Vrindavana who took upon themselves the task of building up the new system, the contribution of Rupa was most conspicuous. The metaphysics of *Gaudiya Vaishnavism* might have been the single large contribution of Jiva but the cult of devotion woven round the *Radha-Krishna-lila* peculiar to this School, was on all hands the unique contribution of Rupa.

At the hand of the rhetoricians, devotion found recognition as an emotion (*bhava*) directed to the adorable gods, fathers and kings. Tranquil devotion to Lord Vishnu, lit by the effulgence of knowledge, was later found to be of sufficient importance even in poetic composition. It had therefore to be recognized as an additional sentiment (*rasa*) besides the conventional eight or nine with detachment to worldly pleasures as its nucleus. But Rupa conferred the status of *Rasa* on devotion to Sri Krishna. This pure emotion, *Suddha Bhava* had varying motifs-sexual, as in the

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case of the Gopis; kinship, as in the case of Yasoda; divine grace, as in the case of myriads of devotees.

A close scrutiny of the motifs reveals the fact that Sri Krishna was believed to be a historical personage with all details as recorded in the *Srimad Bhagavata*. In Vrindavana, he had on the one hand the Gopis who had fastened their minds on him, lured by his extraordinary physical charm with all qualities of an ideal lover. He had on the other his kith and kin, the different relations, including people who just wanted to serve him. Rupa played on the whole gamut of these varying relations at Vrindavana and co-ordinated them into the structure of his devotion. But within the structure he rearranged the relations in hierarchical order with the impulse of sex in the Gopis as the climax. Thus according to Rupa, devotion to Sri Krishna might be actuated by any of the above motifs and such devotion ultimately matured into a full-fledged sentiment in each case. Nevertheless, the devotion of Gopis to Krishna was sentiment *par excellence*. It was divine love in which sex impulse is crystallised through the fire of selflessness. It was therefore the sweetest of all sentiments. All other sentiments for Krishna are also marked by the common characteristic of selflessness. But they differ qualitatively from the sentiment of the Gopis in point of intensity and sweetness. Rupa need not argue much for establishing this difference because the rhetoricians had already recognised the supremacy of *sringara* over all other sentiments.

Love of the Gopis for Krishna was the model to be emulated. Rupa allowed the free play of religious imagination that forged identification of a devotee with Radha or the Gopis as a method of worship of Krishna. In this he conceded to the practice of imitation of pre-Chaitanyaite Vaishnavism but to a very limited extent. He ruled out, for instance, the imitation of Krishna by a common man in the context of a common woman. His stoic asceticism obtained as a heritage from Sankarite tradition in unbroken continuity from Sridhara, Kesava Bharati, Isvara Puri and Sri Chaitanya, ruled out such unwarranted extension, although

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this pitfall could not altogether be avoided by later Vaishnavism in Bengal.

The imitation of Radha or Gopi by a common devotee was supposed to create a mental situation in him, analogous to the pure emotion (*Suddha Bhava*) of Radha for Krishna. In fact, as indicated above, imitation is one of the methods for the dawning of pure emotion. One might argue whether emotion brought about by mere imitation of Radha can be absolutely identical with the emotion of Radha for Krishna. But the same question may be posed against the rhetoricians in a slightly different way : Whether the actor feels the same way as Rama in the presence of Sita ? And the answer proposed by the rhetorician is worthy of attention. Yes, they say, because the feeling of an actor (if he is a *sahridaya*) is not an individualistic attitude but a refined mental situation shared in common by real Rama and the actor. Similar is the case with pure emotion which is the common property of Radha and a devotee. At least this was so in the life of Sri Chaitanya. There is no evidence to prove that in the eyes of Rupa, Sanatana or Jiva, Sri Chaitanya was a divine incarnation, Radha, Krishna or both. Yet Rupa found in him pure emotion for Krishna and such emotion eventually matured into divine sentiment with its climax in divine madness (*Mahabhava*).

Although Rupa confined pure emotion to Radha and allowed that privilege to a devotee who imitated Radha in her feelings for Krishna, he was catholic enough to find a place for the traditional method of worship under Sastric injunction. Only he geared that method to the worship of Sri Krishna in exclusion of other deities.

As in the Vallabha School, Rupa assigned a respectable place to divine grace in his scheme of devotion. It could be achieved, Rupa asserted, and no ostensible cause was there for its possession. It was divine grace radiating on some one irrespective of time and place, caste and creed.

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A passionate devotee, a trained scholastic mind, Rupa thus invented a new dimension for *sweet* devotion (*Madhura Bhakti*) and he brought his creative genius with all its poetic grandeur and sensuous imageries of the *sahajiya* to bear upon his cherished approach of devotion coupled with selflessness.

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HARIDASAS

M. Venkatesha Iyengar

The twelfth century seems to have been a time a spiritual upheaval all over India. It was very much so in South India. Ramanujacharya who systematised southern Vaishnavism did his work in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka a little before the beginning and in the earlier years of that century. Basavanna led the Virasaiva movement in Karnataka shortly after this. Not long after came Madhwacharya in western Karnataka. While various classes, dissatisfied with existing social conditions and religious institutions, could throw in their lot with reformers like Basavanna, there must have been a great mass of people to whom also change seemed desirable but who were not prepared to leave the pale of orthodoxy for getting it. Movements therefore arose which slackened the bonds of social custom and religious ceremonial without asking people to go outside the bounds of orthodoxy. The Haridasa movement was the Karnataka analogue of such movements.

Like all movements which have tried to take religion to the common people, the Haridasa movement laid stress upon the devotional aspect of religion and relied upon the vernacular for carrying on its propaganda. It also developed an order of preachers called *Haridasas,* meaning servants of Hari or Vishnu, the highest idea of godhead as conceived in it. These people received initiation from a teacher in the main tenets of their creed, the substance of which was that God was a personal being, faultless, full of good qualities, merciful and watchful of the welfare of all creation; and that He would save all who acknowledged Him in their life. Naturally the creed discounted ritual and ceremonial. It discountenanced the worship of many gods and the sacrifice of life in worship of the godhead. It

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disapproved of astrology and horoscopy, and emphasized reliance on God's mercy. It distinguished between community by birth and community by quality, declaring that a man's inner being was of more consequence than the social circumstances of his birth or growth. The Haridasa movement was thus really a reform movement. It did not break away from existing institutions but tried rather to modify them in the direction in which salvation appeared to lie. Hundreds of preachers of the movement went about the country with the message of liberation, singing psalms of wisdom and religious experience and preaching God from door to door.

The first of the Haridasas was an ascetic of the name of Narahari Tirtha. He was perhaps the first to express in a song in the vernacular his feelings in relation to God and life.

The following pieces are from a song composed by Narahari Tirtha. It is probably the first he composed. The sentiment and expression are worthy of the beginner of the Haridasa movement.

"In words I have been God's servant, and greatly learned in discourse; the mind has, however, loved money and wordly pleasure and wronged God and the teachers and felt no fear.

"As the years have passed I have grown more covetous and am loading myself with error; I have gathered stone and shell like a child and given up the shield of life.

"For whom is it, soul, that you are so anxious ? For whom do you hoard this wealth ? Wife, and children, friend and others, none of them will go with you when you leave the world.

"For giving in charity a pie has been a thousand; for improper expenditure a crore has been a pie; in doing good you have felt no interest, in doing evil awake and active.

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"Call on God to whom all creation submits and give up the enemies within the self; call on Him whom all righteous men worship, the Lord of all good, the King of the Universe".

The next important name in the tradition is that of Vyasaraya. Next after him, is Purandaradasa. Purandaradasa seems at first to have been wealthy and to have lived a life of luxury and ease, unwilling to share his wealth with the poor. He had a wife who was very pious and devout. The story is told that God took mercy on him and came once in the guise of a poor Brahmana and asked alms of him. Purandara refused. Then the Brahmana went to the wife. Fearing lest her husband should know, she gave him a small trinket which had come to her from her mother. The beggar took the trinket to the husband for sale immediately. The latter suspected that the trinket should have been given by his wife and went home vexed and angry and asked for it. The wife went in as if to bring it and did not know what to do. In great distress she thought of taking poison, when the trinket dropped into the cup which held the poison. She took it and showed it to her husband. He wondered that it should be with her and looked for it where he had kept it and found it was gone. This miracle opened his eyes and he renounced property and became God's minstrel.

Purandaradasa strikes the keynote of the Haridasa rule of life in a song of admission of human weakness and surrender to God. "So without end are my faults, my master", he says, "I have not the tongue even to sue for pardon". Pride on various counts, and over-much love of wife and children and other relatives, had made him forget to love god the slayer of evil.

He argues and asks in another piece if parents give up the children they have borne and cease to look after them because the children are silly. "If I, your servant, am ignorant may you, Lord, leave me without protection? Tell me, Purandara

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Vitthala !" "I shall not let go your feet", he says in another piece, "whatever you do I shall cling to you, for yours is the task of taking me across".

The state of mind of the devotee when he has given up the way of the world as no way for him, and has not felt the assurance of realisation, is described by Purandaradasa in vivid metaphor in a well-known song. He had not found the nest nor the track that led to it. Away had both wives gone, and the walls of the house had fallen and its place was empty. Peace in God was gone nor did he know what luxury was in store for him in future. His mind had forsaken thought of the eternal Lord and had become barren. He cries in one place that he is like the insect that has fallen into the fire and begs God to take him out and save him. He asks God why He has dragged him into this world. Why could He not look after him in heaven, why did He give him birth ? Elsewhere the same mood finds even fuller expression. That God was merciful ; he was somehow not quite sure, seeing that He was giving this body again and again and was making him wander and was trying him so. If God really were merciful let Him come and hold his devotee by the hand and save him. If He were propitious would bad impulses torment the devotee ?

When in the course of spiritual ascent he feels weaker than usual, Purandaradasa cries out to God and says that this abandonment was not right. Again:

> "Knowing all and aware of all, may you forsake me thus ? O Lotus-eyed, O great One, O God ! I have no friends, life holds no pleasure for me, I have suffered from calumny, kind one ; you are father and mother, you are brother and friend; and always I have trusted in you, Krishna.
>
> "The moments have become as ages and I have become lighter than straw; I have suffered in countless births. Thou, worshipped by sages, and Creator of the world's

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creator, Sleeper on the serpent, Saviour of Prahlada, Krishna.

"Having assumed the title of Protector of devotees, should you not be at hand to them ? O you, who liberate man, my God, Purandara Vitthala, I have trusted in you as competent to save".

What actually the experience was that wrung this kind of cry from him we do not know but it finds even more poignant utterance elsewhere.

God was to Purandaradasa's mind almost a human master. He says that for his own prestige He should save His servants. "I may have devotion or I may not. The good, however, call me your servant. See to it now that people shall not say that a servant of God was dragged down by the powers of death". This prayer of Purandaradasa was heard and He who is competent to save all souls saved his and we hear in songs of what must have been a later day, a more hopeful note and finally assurance of salvation.

"When I am dwelling in thought of you, what harm can wicked men do to me ?

"What will they do to me being evilly disposed towards me, when you, Eternal One, are looking after me ? All the moments of life I live in thought of you. Will ants besiege a fire ?

"If a horse makes a rush to show off speed will the dust it raises besiege the sun ? To men who can ensure no harm can come. Will the hill shake in the wind ?

"If the thief sees a purse in the mirror and makes a hole in the mirror to get it, will it become his ? I have placed my trust in you, O Purandara Vitthala, save me".

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"Come what will", he says elsewhere, "only let us have our Lord's grace. Who says I am poor and who says I am friendless? Nay, I am neither while I have you, my God. To him who can pray to God, here is Heaven and here He is present with his angels."

Thus himself, convinced Purandaradasa preached his faith to others. He told men that to please God should be their main object in life; the pleasing of others is a secondary matter. The harm that anyone can do to us in being angry with us is little. The good they can give by becoming propitious is of no value. Purandaradasa makes it clear, however, that it is no small matter to become God's servant. That service is not for men of the world, for it implies giving up the evil in oneself and living in thought of the Deliverer. This is not easy. So for a beginning, man may well serve God's servants.

> "To become your servant is the fruit of the accumulated merit of how many lives, O Bright and Merciful God, Eternal Source of Good ! Grant me in fullness the service of your servants".

Failure in the world is not necessarily failure in the highest purpose of life. If men will not have you, they may be merely turning you on to God. Of his own experience Purandaradasa said that people laughed and scoffed at him and left him God's name, they broke and choked him and cured him of useless hope, they tried him and wearied him and rid him of desire and anger. By much teasing they showed him the way to realisation. They treated him as a life dedicated to God; they would have nothing to do with him. Elsewhere he said :

> "Who that trusted you has prospered, my God ? Listen ! If a man accepts you, he cannot get even a handful of grain as alms".

Men of the world are a prey to anxiety. There is one way out of this anxiety and that is to trust in God, not waver. There is no one who trusted in God and was lost.

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Show of orthodoxy and ceremonial purity are worthless. Those who do not give up self and desire but are orthodox and showy in worship, do it for getting food and pleasing men. Theirs is saintliness for the sake of stomach. There is no jot of devotion to God in it. If men have not the will to clear the mind of evil, but get up at dawn and bathe and go to temple, what good is it? The old frog which stays in water both morning and evening, what less does it do? If men understand, Truth is bathing and fasting and meditation and discipline combined; ceremony performed by the untruthful is waste. Men wash the dirt on the body but can they wash the mind by bathing in sacred water?

Knowledge as a load of information, and knowledge which does not improve life are worthless. What is one's knowledge if one does not know oneself? What use is the repetition of a formula if the mind is not pure?

Man's worst enemies are within. "I fear not fire nor prison nor do I fear for my body. I fear not snake or scorpion nor the edge of the sword; one thing only I fear, one I dread within; other's money, other's woman—these two I fear".

To men claiming godliness but not worthy of reverence he was harsh; to men striving for recognition as wise or important, he said, "Say not, friends, I am bigger, I am bigger. There is only one who is big—our Purandara Vitthala".

He told the learned that wrangling about God's nature is useless. That He is all-powerful and all-pervading is all that we can say. "Thus is God. So is God. Let me tell you how he is". He has no feet but makes all move; He has no hands but makes all hold; He has no teeth but makes all chew; He has no stomach but makes all eat; He has no ears but makes all hear; unseen, He pervades within, without. From Him comes all. He is all that men have thought He is. And Purandaradasa saluted God's form of Creator and His form of Destroyer; His form of the King of Gods and His form of the moon; His form of moveless

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life and His form of moving life. He saluted in fact God's form as manifest in all creation. It is useless to try to describe God adequately by language meant for the world's life. The Infinite cannot be encompassed so. He can be an atom, He can be a world; He can be both at once. He can be form, He can be formless; He can be formless form; He can be manifest; He can be latent; He can be both in one; He can have qualities; He can be quality-less; He can be the two together. The impossible is possible for God's power. Unthinkable and wondrous is the greatness of Purandara Vitthala.

All nature is obeying God's law as is said in the *Upanishads* :

"The earth fears and the hills and the rivers and the sea;

They all fear you and keep their places ;

The wind fears you and moves and the fire fears you and burns ;

The trees and creepers yield fruit ;

O Purandara Vitthala, what a King are you !"

A good man does not necessarily desire to leave the world of work. Only, he wishes to be always serving God within. "O Lord of all that is good, grant me but this : That I shall ever live the inner life in you". Life is of value only as an opportunity to serve God. "It is nothing very much, this life of a few days. Know this and give in charity and do good". Man has an opportunity to rise which is denied to beasts. He should make use of the opportunity ;

"Birth as a human being is a great opportunity. Do not misuse it, O silly, O foolish ones. Garner merit before the raid. Be not caught in the whirl of false living".

He asks people to remember that God's mercy alone stands. Life in the world is fleeting. Build tanks, raise groves, relieve

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people in distress. Give food to those who come to the house asking for it and win heaven.

Man must have patience with the world and go through with life showing, however, no weakness through self and attachment. You must swim across sea, you must fight through life and win. Being unattached to self and desire, loving life as the water on the lotus-leaf loves the leaf and singing always that Rama is Lord, those who would have the soul's desire should swim and win.

In another piece Purandaradasa preaches patience with fault-finders and kindness in return for unkindness. He asks men to realise the secret of the text that right alone succeeds and act wisely ; to him who gives poison, to give sweet and tasty food ; to serve him who hates ; to praise and oblige him who reviles falsely; and if a man deceives, to give his name to their son and honour him and all the while sing the glory of Lotus-eyed Purandara Vitthala and realise the purpose of life.

He told men inclined to think of astrology and horoscopy that trust in God was the real astrology and horoscopy.

Caste is not a mere matter of birth: it is in character. Do you see the outcaste only outside the village ? Is there no outcaste within ? For there are men who are outcastes by their character.

The doctrine of Karma is preached fervently in many of the songs. One of the most familiar says : "That a man has thought on God with devotion, is borne out by his words coming true; that he gave food to others, by his getting food to eat".

Purandaradasa gives a new meaning to sacrifice. What we should slay in sacrifice is our bad qualities. This is a familiar way of weaning people from the lower forms of worship.

We cannot please God by what we are. We please Him by acknowledging Him. What is it that we can take as gift to Him ?

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With what shall we please him, Lord of the humble ? He should give to us rather the thought of Him.

Man should not put off the impulse to rise. He should use it when it comes. Winnow the corn when the wind is blowing. Say not "tomorrow". Now is the time; come. God is gracious and is ever more ready with His mercy than man with devotion. He will carry grass to the house of those who bring Him flowers. He has no pride at all, the Lord of all wealth.

Purandaradasa was what in modern parlance should be called a mystic. It appears from his story that he was a man of strong impulses and will. When he was of the world he was heartily of it; when he awoke from worldliness he reacted strongly and gave up the world altogether. He felt near to God and yet far and passed some time on the swing of faith, feeling his unworthiness keenly, and slowly realising the mercy of God. This is the story of all strong natures which start in the world's race and feel pulled towards God in the middle of it. Purandaradasa did not write reminiscence. If he had, we should have had a book like St. Augustine's *Confessions,* or Mahatma Gandhi's story of his life. Yet Purandaradasa put enough of himself into his songs to give them the colour of his personality. In the songs which he obviously composed late in life we see how near God was to his heart.

The songs of Purandaradasa indicate a mind familiar with the world and its ways and inclined as much to see without as within. Wide knowledge, deep experience, and a great love of humanity are visible in them. Their range is great. Man of many types will find something in him to satisfy. The songs preach no mere renunciation. Life in thought of God is what they teach. They warn the prosperous ones of his generation against thinking too much of the pleasure of the body and material success and to the needy and destitute give the message that they need not despair. God still was father to

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all and misfortune might only be His way of calling them to Himself. His teaching so appealed to the people of his and succeeding generations that he is still the Servant of Hari that men remember best.

Purandaradasa is the most important figure among Haridasas, but he was only one of a large group of like-minded people. Narahari Tirtha, the reputed originator of the movement, and Kanakadasa—believed to have been a contemporary of Purandaradasa—have been mentioned earlier. Well-known successors of these are Vijayadasa, Jagannathadasa and Gopaladas. Other singers are named in the tradition and pieces attributed to them occasionally sung.

Kanakadasa was a shepherd by birth, became a disciple of the same Vyasaraya who probably was Purandaradasa's preceptor and was held in great respect by his teacher and friends. Some stories are told of this saint which suggest that his rise in the preceptor's favour was not quite pleasing to persons who were conscious of their superior caste. One story states that the preceptor wanted to teach the grumblers a lesson and one day in the open assembly called to him some of these men as well as Kanakadasa and gave each a plantain with the direction that they should eat it where they would not be seen. They all went out and came back later, Kanaka last. Kanaka brought the fruit intact. The others had eaten theirs in some secret place. Kanakadasa was asked why he did not eat the fruit. He said, "I could not eat it anywhere. You told me that I should eat it unseen. Wherever I went I felt that God's eyes were on me". "See", said the teacher, "that is why Kanakadasa is better than the rest of us". A tradition at Udupi runs to the effect that when Kanakadasa came to the temple for worship and could not gain admission to the presence of the deity, he went to the rear of the temple and prayed. The image in the temple turned towards him : that is, towards the wall behind which Kanakadasa stood. The people then realised how great the devotee was and made a hole in the wall so that he might have a view of the image. Another

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story says that one day a hungry dog came into his house and took some bread and ran out; and that his wife blamed him for looking on when bread was being taken away by a dog. Kanakadasa took some jaggery and ghee and ran after the dog calling : "O Great one, my God living in all life, eat not mere bread. Have this too". It is said that he had a vision of God on this occasion. Other stories are told to show his skill in talk and his power to worship God mentally.

Kanakadasa's songs show more subtlety than Purandaradasa's. They are more philosophical in tone. The following song of his is very familiar to people :

> "This body is yours : so is the life within it :
> yours too are the sorrows and joys of our daily life.
>
> "Whether sweet word or *Veda* or story of law, the power in the ear that hears them is yours ; the vision in the eye that gazes lidless on beauty of young form, yea, that vision is yours.
>
> "The pleasure that we feel in living together with fragrance of musk and sweet scents, that is yours : and when the tongue rejoices in the taste of its food, yours is the pleasure with which it rejoices.
>
> "This body of ours and the five senses which are caught in this net illusion, all, all is yours. O source of all desire that the body bears, is man his own master ? Nay, all his being is yours".

A well known song of Kanakadasa teaches trust in God. He tells his mind not to tremble but bear up a little. God will protect all. We need have no doubt of this. The feeling of wonder which comes over us when we look into the structure of our life and thought and of nature around us is expressed by Kanakadasa in another song. Is God in *Maya* or is *Maya* in God ? Is God in the body or is body in God ? Is the building in space or the space in the building ? Or are both space and

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building in the eye ? Or is the eye in the mind or the mind in the eye ? Or are both eye and mind in Krishna ?

In another piece Kanakadasa tells his mind to beware or it will go to ruin. The words can be addressed to any one. "Choose not evil. Hold the rod of chastisement in the hand and use it against yourself. Be not elated at the thought of body and possession ; walk not the way of destruction, consort not with the wicked ; fall not, fall not. Do not practise deceit and earn wages of sin. . . Forget not your true nature, keep your desire within limits. And forget not the beautiful and eternal Lord. Forget Him not".

Kanakadasa says pilgrimages are of no use and the sacred rivers are no more sacred than we who bathe in them make of life. What good comes of living beside the sacred rivers Krishnaveni, Ganga, Godavari and Tungabhadra and fasting and bathing in them with devotion and performing ceremony and fulfilling vow ? Why this exertion ? Get near to the soul of all being which is within : experience good and get real release. Get strong. As other teachers said this teacher also said that purity was something within. A man bows a hundred times and plunges into water : yet turns his eyes to women and makes his mind prisoner to them. His show is like filling the inside of the gourd with toddy and putting on the outside a garland and decorations of purity. He remonstrates with persons speaking of castes and tells them not to fight and asks one of the fighters what his caste is. There is no birth which he has not had, there is no land which he has not trodden, there is nothing which he has not cooked and eaten. Why then talk of caste, caste, caste ? Know the truth within. Then, too, where is caste for those who know the pleasure of right life ? What caste is soul, what caste is life, what is the caste of the vital principles and the senses ? Where is caste for the man whom the great God Adikesava has looked on with grace ? Let a man remember Him to whom no one is stranger. Of himself, however, Kanakadasa spoke in great humility. He says in one piece :

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"I have not devotion of the size of the gingili-seed. I am thief amidst thieves, showy like the crane."

He advises people not to worship endless numbers of village-deities but to give in charity and do good.

Vadiraja, a younger contemporary of Purandaradasa and Kanaka was another ascetic Haridasa. Complete surrender is expressed in the following piece by him.

> "I have approached your feet, O Venkataramana, my God of the loving and lotus-like eyes and abode of all that is good ! I am a waif, my God, and you are my one refuge; take pity on me of your grace and look on me as your own. Think not of my failing my God, You who sleep on the serpent, O Great One ! You look after whole nations ; even so look after me. Sleeper on the serpent, Lord of mercy, Great Hayavadana."

Vijayadasa, a successor of Purandaradasa and Kanakadasa, revived the tradition in his time. In one piece he describes his spiritual awakening, using the figure of a sealed house opened by officers of justice. The door of his being opened that day. He knew not how he reaped this fruit that comes only of righteousness. It had been the home of evil all that time. He was deceived till that day and through the mountain of darkness could not see. God's grace was the key and the teacher's mercy was the strength. In company with the servants of God he went to his being and in the name of God opened the seal. The enemies that were around fled. He went in through the door holding firmly in the hand the light of knowledge fed with devotion. What did he find ? A beautiful palace all around; and there, seated on the lotus of the heart, praised by the lords of creation, served by the wealth of earth and heaven and surrounded by reflections of His being, he saw Vijaya Vitthala in whom existence, knowledge and bliss are one. The simile is a little over-elaborated but the saint seems in ordinary life to have been

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a servant of the law and it came to him naturally. It should also have been well understood in the circle in which the song was first sung and even to us of a later day the picture has a certain grandeur.

Vijayadasa asks his soul in one place why it came into the world. Did it need to know what the world is like ? Why did it leave the heavenly abode where it waited in service on God's presence ? Very well, then, he says and pretends to let it have a go at life. Woman, gold and earth, always, are its possession. Well, let it enjoy them. But he fears that the soul may take this seriously and says again in tones of persuasion : "Look here, soul ! Let by-gones be by-gones, bury the past and love God and live in thought of Him from now on". Mere knowledge and ceremony are no good, he says, in another place. Liberation comes not without realisation, come whatever else will. He repeats in another piece that it does not matter where he is, the man who is not for God; even if he utters God's name without intermission, he will not reach eternal life. In another piece he confesses to God that he had sat in silence for meditation and shown wondrous qualities to the eyes of men but had not given up the self and had been the worst of human creatures. He had not a jot either of wisdom, or unwavering faith. Nor had he given up desire. He told God who is said to meet every wish of his devotees that he had been a sinner before Him and begged Him not to remember his failings against him. Earning livelihood by speaking of God he described in one piece as giving a ruby and taking vegetables in exchange.

Jagannathadasa is another well-known devotee. He calls on God to come and dwell with him.

> "Come, O Merciful One ! And stay for ever in my heart, thou great without a second, Lord of all that is good !
>
> "Come O Beautiful, Gracious to devotees ! Come and stay ever in the soft petals of my heart-lotus; to see

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your holy feet, O Merciful One, I have performed numerous austerities, observed numerous vows.

"I have given up thought of body, mind and wealth and dream always of your lotus-like feet; I have now felt the desire for you. Giver of men's desires, fulfil that desire. Delay not, I have lost my heart to you".

He says he is God's servant :

"Your servant am I, your servant am I. Your servant and ever your servant. You, dweller in all life, centre of holiness, your servant am I. O Heart of life, giver of life, Creator of the Creator, Lord of existence, your servant am I. Heart of time, directing time; you who are beyond time, who set time in motion, you who stop time, Master of time, time's very form : your servant am I."

He says that to those who know the way, worship of God is very easy. Those who do not know are indeed unfortunate. He asks for the company of the beneficent souls who call on God's name in delight. Elsewhere he tells his mind what things are worthwhile for man : "Devote yourself to God's story. In the worship of metal and stone images there is nothing to be gained. If you bathe in many waters, you wash dirt; but you do not get real knowledge. Give up low thoughts and serve good men". In another piece he asks God why He tried this servant of His servants' servants and begs Him to bestow on him that which is good. The devotee's failure indeed was immeasurable and God is essentially just, but let Him not forsake the sinner on that account. Passions invested the man and he forgot God. Let not the Unchanging One, the Eternal Bliss in wisdom, look on these many and great faults, but forgive him.

Vasudevadasa, another well-known devotee, begged this only of God and prayed to Him to be propitious and grant the request. He would take nothing else from the Knower of all. That one

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prayer was that he be not placed in the company of the evil-minded; not beg of all and sundry; that he be shown only the story that concerns God. He could not live a moment without God or something that concerned Him. He rejoiced to see God's servants. When he could hear of God he liked not to hear useless talk of other things. Long life without thought of God, he felt, was worthless, was nothing. Living but an hour he truly lives who counts himself as one of God's men.

This prayer is by Gopaladasa :

> "Saviour of your flock and Granter of salvation, show me your lotus-like feet today; O Beautiful, O son of Nandagopa, Saviour of the distressed, Lord of all good !
>
> "I have been caught in the bonds of life and see not the way and am weary; say I am your child, and forget my faults and save me O, father, source of Desire!
>
> "I know not the truth and have lived as a coward; and have not devoted myself to you; I have not seen you, nor sung your glory ; O Graceful, I pray you save me.
>
> "I have been a burden in the life of the world. I strayed from the path and joined evil men. There is no one to save me and I have come to you. O Magnanimous One, Sweet Musician, Father, take me across".

A large number of the songs of the Dasas relate to the story of Krishna, the individual soul being thought of as beloved of God and the love of God described in terms of human love. Some of these pieces show keen love of nature's beauty. In one of them a maiden waking to the love of Krishna asks her friend who it is that is playing so sweetly on the flute in Vrindavana, holding it in his hands soft as tender leaves. The hill-side, she sees, is filled with the sound and the birds have gathered round the flutist. Is it possible to go and see Krishna immediately ? Who is it playing on

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the flute? The cows have forgotten to graze and Jamuna has slowed down her pace. With cowherds tending their cows all round, who is it, so graceful and handsome playing his flute in Vrindavana? The elder one who has known the joy of the love of God tells her it is Krishna and that the Gods have shed heaven's flowers on Him. "Go and see in Vrindavana. It is Sri Krishna in *kadamba* forest, tending cows; go and see".

It has been forgotten that these songs written to describe divine love in this manner form a metaphor. This is the dilemma of symbolic writing. A simile is taken to explain in terms of something familiar, some truth which is abstruse. The abstruseness is indeed removed but the truth is also removed with it and the symbol remains in its place. In some of these songs the love for God is pictured as love for a paramour and the devotee's relations with the world as the relations with a husband. The symbolism was not intended to recommend improper love in the world by comparing it to divine love any more than to condemn divine love by comparing it to improper love in the world. The use, however, of the holiest of loves we know in such juxtaposition with the unholiest love introduced an element of confusion. Defenders of the metaphor will say that the fault is that of the person who misunderstands. This is no doubt true but part of the responsibility lies with those who use dubious metaphor in speaking to simple people.

We shall close with one example of later songs. The piece seems to have been written by a devotee who lived about a hundred years ago.

> "I have placed full trust in you, Panduranga; shine Thou ever in the throne of my heart; Dispeller of the terror of wordly life in devotees, your mercy is your treasure, Panduranga.
>
> "Even in the midst of the world's great throng, teach my mind to rest firmly in you; all the work I do is part

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of your worship; give me constantly this share in your worship.

"Overlord and God, let me constantly have the thought of your world play, Panduranga; remove my dependence on others; show me my path to the highest good.

"Alike in joy and in great sorrow, my friend be Thou, Panduranga; Life of Life, Vyasa Vitthala, Panduranga, let me always see the light of your countenance".

The Haridasa movement made an effort to place a complete code of morality and religion before the people. Its main object was to condemn formalism and ritualism in religion and a too arduos pursuit of wordly prosperity. It preached, instead devotion to God and recognition of spiritual values. It preached also that the better life was not meant for a few people but was meant for all and should be striven after by all. It has been sometimes said that the Dasas preached indifferentism and quiescence and removed the impulse to work in the world by decrying individual efford and emphasizing the doctrine of *Karma*. It is true that single lines and sometimes pieces seem to speak in this strain. Possibly, particular Dasas preach only such doctrine and no other. The accusation, however, cannot be made against the whole school. All teaching has to be understood with reference to the circumstances in which it arose. It should also be remembered that these songs are lyric and the idea in each depends on the incident which gave birth to it. At the time of prosperity when addressing men who had enough to eat the teacher may well say : "Do not think your bodies are eternal. Remember you have a soul. Eating and drinking are not the whole of life". To a generation that has more hunger than food this advice not to love the world's pleasures too much naturally seems mockery. We should see that the advice was meant for the full man, not the hungry one. It applies today to the full man. So far from preaching quiescence the songs

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prescribe the doing of good deeds. It may be objected that this was recommended as a means of acquiring merit and not for its own sake. The motive was suggested for the common man who could be got to do such work only if he could gain something. Men of higher mind were asked to work for pleasing God. It is true that the teaching was not always understood and led to error in life. This, however, has happened to nearly all teaching since the world began. We do not judge a doctrine by the lives of the people who misunderstood it but by those who understood it. We judge it by what it meant to do and what at least partially it succeeded in doing.

The Haridasa tradition is still alive though not very active. As an attempt to reform orthodoxy from within we can imagine that the movement had to meet peculiar difficulties. In assessing human worth it changed the emphasis from birth to character. In preaching the greatness of the one God it condemned lower forms of worship which the orthodox religion permitted and even accepted into the fold. In placing emphasis on the meaning rather than on the language and taking the best thought to the people it touched vested interests to the quick. Mendicancy even in the name of God seemed to many somewhat of a fall from the dignity which the teachers of the people should claim. That the Haridasa movement was treated with some hostility quite early in its history is evident from the fact that Vaishnavas were soon divided into *Vyasakuta* and *Dasakuta,* meaning the Vyasa group and the Dasa group, the former relying on Sanskrit texts and older traditions, the latter on the new teaching on a reformed basis. The movement, however, has persisted inspite of opposition and mendicants of the order even now go about singing songs composed by themselves and the songs of their predecessors and contemporaries.

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RAHIM

Shamsher Bahadur Singh

We vaunt much about our culture and civilization. But how do we experience it as a living reality, and how do we see it in its living form? If it is so all-comprehensive, universal, as we all believe, and truly great, if it is a repository of centuries of intellectual probing and deep searching, pulsating with human concern for future well-being and progress of mankind, how could we grasp its intrinsic values without the aid and guidance of history—history of the whole sub-continent of our motherland? It is not a magic wand in your hand. But it is certainly something like a huge and vast banyan tree, proliferating and spreading out in an ever-widening canopy of foliage, branches and shoots, incorporating you and me, like hosts of others down the ages. We cannot form any idea of the whole of its form from just any one branch of it, much less can we understand or discover its full form and content.

Now, it is some four hundred years ago that on some prominent branch of this great tree, a dove (you might say) flew happily in and took his humble perch. But his cocings filled part of this vast canopy with his sweet reverberations, so much so that the echoes are still not inaudible at this distance of time. That great courageous Dove was Rahim.

The Rosary of Devotional Lives (or *Bhaktamala Prasang*) contains a beautiful anecdote which runs as follows:—

Across our borders once there lived a Pathan, Rahim by name. And fame reached him of the radiant beauty of Srinathji*.

*The God of the Vallabh sect of Vaishnavas. In earlier times His temple stood on the slopes of Govardhana, near Mathura.

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He yearned to be face to face with Him. And the impulse set him on the journey. Day and night he travelled, taking no rest. When he reached the holy gates and as he wanted to push in, "Hey, do not enter !"—he was sternly checked. Then Rahim, in an irritated voice, returned : "Mark the Eminence here ! And then this sorry lack of common courtesy ! And, well, if it was to be thus, why was the passionate urge created in me ! Why this call ?"

> "Complains Rahim, the Divinity has meted me out a fate as that of the arrow on the taut string of a bow. For a moment pulled me in close, and then, shot me away into distance".

Having uttered these sentiments he moved away into the shade of a rock. The high priest (*Gusainji*) heard him, and taking the sweet offerings in a plate, placed it before Rahim. Then to him thus remarked he : "Baba, why do you trouble yourself now and come to me ! What have I to do with you ! I make complaints to Him alone, who sent me the Call". Then Srinathji Himself brought the plate of divine offerings to him, upon which Rahim turned his back, looking the other way.

> "Pull it down to yourself and up and away it goes, the lantern hung high on the pole; play loose with it, let it go, and there, it comes back to you. Mohan, my beloved, what a strange experience Love is !"

Then Srinathji retraced his steps. And now, he was all regrets. "How foolish of me to have acted the way I did ! What's to be my lot now!" He pondered. "Nothing, but that I pass my days hereafter in recounting His ways".

> "The eyes are all too full of Mohan's beauty
> How can there be room for other beauties ?
>
> Finding the caravansarai full, every new
> traveller turns away from the gates".

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This may be apocryphal. But it is illustrative of certain trends. A few of the nobility, no doubt, sought to deepen their cultural sensibility by recourse to the *sat-sang,* ie., by keeping spiritual audience with renowned saints and sufis. It was part of the way of life with those who placed highest value on integrity of spirit and mind. This group almost invariably included those who possessed the highest degree of artistic refinement. Certainly, as all accounts concur, Nawab Abdur-Rahim Khan-i-Khanan was one such luminary. And the reader of history knows that his upbringing and complete education was a precious trust of no less a person than emperor Akbar the Great, himself. So, then, as he grew up into a truly cultured and courteous, truly robust and valiant, truly intelligent and far-sighted young prince, he found himself at home in the varied lores and traditions of the country which he was to serve in war and peace as commander or as patron of the various sciences and arts. The Hindi compositions ascribed to him by popular consent as well as learned references to his literary and artistic acumen and insight in such works as *Ma-asir-e-Rahimi* amply demonstrate that Rahim, the popular poet and the august jewel of Akbar's court, was not only a deep scholar of Persian, Arabic and Turkish but knew Sanskrit, Braj Bhasha and Avadhi so well, that he composed poems in these languages and of a standard that caught the fancy of accomplished masters of his day and those of the subsequent times.

It is not the purpose of this essay to dilate on the well-known military campaigns ably and successfully led by Rahim such as the one in Gujarat, or on the most eminent positions of office which he held in the empire as governor in the various *subas* or as *Vatil* at the centre, etc. What draws us towards this intriguing personality are not these things. Nor are they the intrigues during Jahangir's reign which saddened the last years of his life and closed it in tragedy. True, we feel heavy at heart reading about these things. Even as you look at his silent tomb on the Mathura Road in Hazrat Nizamuddin in New Delhi, you cannot but pause and ask the builder of the mausoleum at

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Safdarjang, "Where's gone all the marble that was once an architectural part of the tomb of the Great Khan-i-Khanan?" And we neglect the great man still.

Rahim is not only so well-informed for his times, and wise but he is so human. Says Ghalib : 'Even it is not vouchsafed to every man to be human.' No better proof of the pure gold that was his metal can be adduced than just this : that his greatest contemporary, Tulsidas, counted him among his friends, although, of course, he needs no credentials. His own Hindi couplets are testimony enough.

He became a legend in his own life time. His magnanimous generosity has been proverbial ever since. Few can be his peers in this respect. His unbounded generosity to all and sundry drew this query in the form of a beautiful piece of rhetoric from Ganga-Kavi, an illustrious poet of his court and his age.

> "Whence O Nawab Ju, did you imbibe this unique mode of munificence ? The higher is the liberal hand raised, lower and still lower bends down the head."
>
> The Khan-i-Khanan's answer was :
>
> "The Munificent One is someone else who keeps on replenishing us day and night. But people delude themselves into thinking that this humble self is the source. Hence the down-cast eyes, in embarrassment".

Tradition has it that the great Khan-i-Khanan was once so thrilled by the excellence of a composition of this very Ganga-Kavi that he awarded him thirty-six lakhs of rupias.

Scholars point out that Rahim has gracefully turned many a Sanskrit gem into polished Braj Bhasha. This peculiar genius is aptly exemplified in the following two couplets :

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"Praised be the waters of the well. Humble folk can slake their thirst to their fill. Where is the supremacy of an ocean, if along its shores the whole world go parched and thirsty ?"

"Rahim, it is common knowledge that Kamala (the wealth-goddess) is never steady at one place. Spouse of the Most Ancient One, how should she not be errant ?"

Thanks to his popularity, such of Rahim's couplets as showed some affinity to the mode and manner of Kabir's were unhesitatingly slipped into the body of the *Sakhis* by popular compilers of rhymed maxims. Come to think of it, it is no small tribute to Rahim. This famous couplet, for example, illustrates the case :

"Rahim, those who go out a begging, they are already dead. But they who face them with a 'Nay' have indeed preceded them."

The man who was so much steeped in our culture and drank deep at its wells, and who at the same time added his own mite to the store of ancient wisdom—why should not his pithy observations, ever full of wit and grace, continue to be a source of perennial pleasure ?

In the mediaeval phase of the history of Hindi poetry Rahim is particularly noteworthy for his "Categories of beautiful women in the *Barawae* measure" (*Barawae Nayika-bhed*). There is reason to believe that Tulsidas felt inspired to compose his Ramayana in the *Barawae* measure (*Barawae Ramayana*), after the verse model set before him by Rahim. The work influenced many a worthy poet coming after. Shri Maya Shankar Yajnik, who specialised on Rahim, thinks that it is quite probable that the famous *Rati* compilation known as "Adornment of the aesthetic modes" *Rasa-srinagar* was put together by the poet Mati Ram himself. To be noted is the fact that in

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this work of aesthetics, categories of beauty and classification of the modes of pleasure are set down by Mati Ram, while the illustrations in each case are taken from Rahim's "Categories of beauty" (*Barawae Nayika-bhed*). "In these *Barawae* measures", says the great critic Pandit Ramchandra Shukla, "we get a faithful glimpse of the true modes of Indian love-relationship". Below we give five of the choicest ones, the same which the critic has cited in his *History of Hindi Literature.*

> Starting up your incessant *coo-coo* so very early, oh winged friend, you inflame my passions. Pray, for a little while, be quiet !
>
> The young wife goes out to set the lighted lamp at the main door, but as soon as mother-in-law and sister-in-law are seen returning home, blows it out.
>
> Even as the loved one was setting foot in her courtyard, she rose up and hurried to greet him. Giggling and full of hints, the witty young girl offered him his due seat.
>
> Joyfully shall I scrape grass with my shapely small hoe alongside my husband. And, oh, ours shall be a single thatched cover in the rains that fill our paths !
>
> At least leave me for consolation, my love, a small rosary, as you go abroad. Telling on it your name would help me bear somewhat the pangs of separation.

There is yet another collection of Rahim's *Barawae* couplets. In parts at least it is of a maturer cast perhaps than the earlier "Categories of Beauty". A few of the couplets evince a power of pathos, somewhat reminiscent of the *padas* of Sur Das. The volume contains descriptions of the distracted feelings of the forlorn Gopis,of their dialogues on love and intellect with Krishna's ascetic philosopher-friend, Uddhava. Besides, there are

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scenes of the rainy season, in racy rural idiom. Here is, for example, Rahim's observation on true love :

> Just as in the course of birth-cycles of millions of creatures it is the rarest luck for a soul to get the chance of a birth in human form (the highest in the range of the living beings), so is the case with true love. It is hardest to find in the whole wide world.

(Non-belief in re-incarnation would not put off the discerning modern reader. On the contrary, he would find his appreciation enhanced by the rhetorical exploitation of the peculiar simile.)

Here is another couplet which describes Krishna's dark-complexioned beauty. The love-lorn Gopi tells her confidant :

> What a wonder of marine glamour does the beauty of Mohan's perfect form possess ! No sooner do you have a glimpse of it, sister, than the eyes (like lotuses) are immersed in it and lost.

"Charms of the city" (or more explicitly "Around the Charming City" : *Nagar-Shobha*) "is a fairly attractive album of folk beauties. It is a precursor of the more famous, Deva's *Jati-Vilas* (or intimate pleasures of the various caste folks)". Rahim in his own racy manner introduces us to the various types of the folk belles representing some sixty caste milieu, each showing off her own characteristic charms. Here we can distinguish a *Brahmani* from a *Khattrani* or a *Rajputni* a *Pathani* from a *Bhatyarin*, a *Jogin* or a *Bhaktin* from a *Dhobin* (washer-woman) or a *Chamarin* (women belonging to the caste of tanners).

The work reflects the cutely observant nature and good humour of the poet. The portraits are anything but dull. Ways of amorous dalliance and all the incidental coquetries are vividly portrayed. The vegetable-seller, for example, is :

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> A brinjal-complexioned girl, selling *sova* and other green salads. With all abandon she intones the sensual songs of the *Phaga* season and the sexy terms of abuse are ever on her lips.
>
> Her baskets are full of green and fresh things. Whosoever is thereby attracted towards her is welcomed with mock abuses. And these actually tantalize the customers all the more.

While depicting the typical character of the Lady Innkeeper, the moralist in Rahim could not resist giving his characteristic twist to the description :

> The Lady Innkeeper and the Goddess of Wealth (Lakshmi) both show the same pattern of behaviour. In either case, there is much fanfare of noble welcome to the incoming clients, while the outgoing ones are brusquely ignored.

Rahim exhibits another very curious style in *Madanashtaka* (or "Eight Stanzas in Praise of the God of Love"). It somehow invariably reminds one of Pandit Ayodhya Singh Upadhyaya (a poet writing in the earlier decades of the present century). Look at this pretty sample :

> *Kalita-lalita-mala ya Jawahara-jara tha Nayana-chakhana wala chandni men khara tha* [Decked in jewels and adorned with garlands all grace and fragrance, he stood there in the moonlight all awareness, all-discernment full of brilliance in his eyes.]

Our pure Sanskritised Khari Boli of the modern period is very much alive here in the sixteenth century. In all his deeper strains, Rahim seeks peace and harmony, only peace and harmony, in life in terms of Indian aesthetics . . . the realization of the *Santa Rasa*, which is not exactly what might be called, 'Didactic Values'. It is quite true, a goodly number of Rahim's couplets are didactic.

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But what I wish to emphasize here is that a good part is not just that; but something more. An appeal not just to our moral instincts only. They touch a deeper chord; where we begin to discern a greater law at work, that of peace and universal harmony. Not the cold logic or moral equations ; but the peace and beatuy, inherent in deeper wisdom and understanding. The finest poetic instincts keep company here. The face of Saraswati is a soft face full of light, flowing with a deeper, quieter music of wisdom. It is that which, in my opinion, Rahim seeks in the best of his poems. And that is the basic reason of his lasting appeal. All such of his couplets are not easy to translate at all. The simple magic of the original lies in the suggestive lilt and utter raciness and richness of the idiom and in the true ring of the deeply felt experience. However, there are a few of the paraphrasings with which we many content ourselves :

> This instrument of the corporal frame is like a winnowing fan. Let it help you winnow out the chaff and dross of the surrounding world. Let the lighter elements be shaken off. Let things that have weight (like the precious grain) augment your store.
>
> Give up haughty airs, Rahim. Adopt the ways of the humble. Be soft of speech. Walk in humility. And everywhere you'll find, it is your own native place.
>
> Value the water of purity. A pearl lacking it or a man of character wanting in it, or even the bread-flour for lack of it, is of no use at all. Therefore, Rahim, do preserve this integral purity.
>
> Don't give jerks to the string of Love's relationship, lest it should break. For, once broken, you cannot join the ends. Even if you join them, there would be a knotted spot there. (No more the straight smooth relationship as before).

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So narrow is the passage of Love's lane that two at a time simply cannot exist there together. If it's your own Ego that is there, then Hari shall not be there. If it's Hari, then the presence of your own Ego is ruled out.

The lotus-flower opens out its broad petals over the waters (that gave it birth) providing shade against the sun; and at moonrise closes up to allow the same waters to keep cool, (with moon-beams). Born with such a noble character, tell me Rahim, is there anyone who would not be his friend, or anyone who would be his foe ?

If you uphold the truth, you lose the world; if falsehood, you never can have divine peace. It is very perplexing, Rahim; since either path is path of severe trial.

There are three situations occurring in life, which reveal to you your good and evil. One is when you are facing a stranger. Another when you are dealing with your neighbour. Yet another when you are striving for some settlement of rights.

A give-and-take approach in love's relationship is never to be recommended. No, Rahim. In such an affairs, one should stake one's whole life, whatever the result, gain or loss.

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MALIK MUHAMMAD JAYASI

Madan Gopal

Malik Muhammad Jayasi's work marks the high water mark of Sufi poetry in India. And yet, not much is known about his life. Also, whatever little is known is gleaned only from his works, wherein, he like other Sufi poets, apart from invoking the blessings of God, the Prophet and the Guru refers also to the ruler of the time, and a few lines about himself. Thus it is from some of the verses in his *Padmavat* and *Akhiri Kalam,* that it has been deduced that Jayasi was born around 1493 A.D. Legend says that the day he was born witnessed a sexere earthquake. He later came to live in the village Jayas near Amethi. The place was considered holy, and was the headquarters of one of the Sects of the Sufis. From verses in his works, we also know that Malik Muhammad was not a handsome man at all; his left eye had no light, and he was deaf in his left ear. His looks evoked laugher, but his compositions more than made up for all these drawbacks and so popular were his works that he was listened to with rapt attention and devotion. Even though he was ugly, Nature endowed him with a heart which was pure and overflowing with love for mankind and a humility which was quite unlike any other poet's. He was honoured by the Raja of Amethi, who believed that he had been endowed with a son because of Jayasi's blessings. Jayasi died in 1542, and his tomb in Amethi is visited by pilgrims even today.

Jayasi's works which were popular with the followers of Sufi saints, remained rather unknown outside the circle until the last century. Bharatendu Harishchandra gave it some space in his *Kavi Vachan Sudha.* Sir George A. Grierson, with the help of Sudhakar Dwivedi translated Jayasi's *Padmavat* and published it in *Bibliotheca Indica* of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Further attention came to be devoted when Acharya Ram Chandra

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Shukla brought out his *Jayasi Granthavali,* with a foreward of 202 pages. A history of Hindi literature published by the Nagari Pracharini Sabha quotes Sayid Ali Mohammad as saying that Malik Muhammad Jayasi wrote more than a dozen works. These include (1) *Padmavat,* (2) *Akharavat,* (3) *Akhiri Kalam* (4) *Sakhavarat,* (5) *Champavat,* (6) *Itaravat,* (7) *Matkavat,* (8) *Chitravat,* (9) *Surva Nama,* (10) *Morai Nama,* (11) *Mukahara Nama,* (12) *Mukhara Nama,* (13) *Posti Nama,* and (14) *Holi Nama.* Acharya Ram Chandra Shukla refers to yet another work, *Nainavat,* by Jayasi. Author of fifteen works, Jayasi, generally speaking, is known as the author of the first three, *viz. Padmavat, Akharavat* and *Akhiri Kalam,* and principally for his *Padmavat,* which is considered a literary masterpiece. Its translation into Bengali by Alaval refers to the date of composition of *Padmavat* as corresponding to 1521 A.D. Jayasi himself refers to Sher Shah as the ruling King of the time. As he ruled from 1540 to 1545, the year of the composition of *Padmavat* is accepted as 1541 A.D., or a year before his own demise. And this work, the most outstanding one written by any Sufi poet before or after Jayasi, is typical of a *bhakta* or devotee of the Sufi Sect. He was deeply influenced by the teachings of Kabir and was thoroughly familiar with the Hindu lore of his times.

The Muslim Sufi saints of India have a long tradition which began with Moinuddin Chishti in the twelfth century A.D. With a view to using local lore for the propagation of their teachings, the Sufi saints undertook a study in depth of local folk lore. This was nothing new to India ; Indian folk tales had always been used by all in the *Mahabharata* and *Puranas,* the Jataka tales of the Buddhist period and work of the Jain teachers.

To the Sufis the popular romances were no ordinary love romances. The beloved to them was God himself, the lover was the devotee or *bhakta,* and the ordeals nothing but obstacles in the culmination of their goal ; which is union between the individual and God. It is also significant that the popular tales were named mostly after the heroines. Jayasi, in his *Padmavat,*

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himself mentions such popular tales as *Madhumalati, Mrigavati, Khandavati, Mugdhavati, Premavati, Swapnavati.* The Sufis took recourse to using such traditional Indian elements of story telling *e.g.* falling in love on seeing a picture or dream about the beloved, or hearing from a parrot about the beloved's beauty, meeting the beloved in temple or anticipating events from "talk" between birds.

The Sufi saints adopted the romances that had been popular with the people with the idea of projecting their own philosophy. The stories were invariably woven round brave kings who had fallen in love with beautiful princesses to possess whom they had to strive hard and undergo trials and tribulations.

The romances that were popular could be classified into three categories, *viz.*, those written for the propagation of spiritual or religious ideals ; those which were temporal romances and, finally, those which were semi-historical romances. The Sufis and the poets of the *bhakti* school used these popular romances for the propagation of spiritual and religious ideals.

The earliest popular romance is believed to have been Mulla Daud's *Chandravati* written during the reign of Alauddin Khilji. Well known poet Kutbun, who was a follower of Sheikh Buddhan of Jaunpur, who lived in the times of Hussian Shah of Jaunpur, the father of Sher Shah, wrote *Mrigavati.*

The story of Padmavati had been in currency at least since the tenth century, when a poet named Mayur wrote his *Padmavat Katha.* The author of *Prithvi Raj Raso, viz.* Chand Bardai, the chronicler of Prithvi Raj, had also referred to the story of Padmayati, which was the name of one of the three queens of Prithvi Raj. Malik Mohammad Jayasi in his famous work on this story invokes the blessings of Prophet Muhammad and Paramatma and refers to the names of two of his spiritual preceptors, the year of composition of the book (in Hijri, which is 593 years after the Gregorian era) and the ruler of the times when he lived. Of his two spiritual preceptors one was Sayid

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Ashraf of Jayas, who was in the line of Nizamuddin Aulia and the other Mahdi (Mohiuddin ?) who belonged to the Sufi sect which resided in Manikpur Kalpi. The ruler of the times when Jayasi lived was Sher Shah (Sur).

After giving all these usual details, Jayasi gives the story of Padmavati, which starts with the description of King Gandharva Sen's island kingdom of Simhala, his beautiful capital city, its gardens and orchards, his parliament his daughter Padmini, or Padmavati, of unparalleled beauty. Padmini's favourite parrot named Hiraman is keen to help locate a suitable husband for her. At some point Gandharva Sen feels annoyed and asks that the parrot be put to death. However, the parrot escapes, only to be made a captive and sold to the Brahmin companion of a trader from Chittor in Mewar. The parrot is taken to Chittor, where Ratan Sen has just succeeded his father Chitra Sen. Ratan Sen is impressed by the cleverness of the parrot and buys off Hiraman for a lakh of rupees. One day, when Ratan Sen is away for shikar, and his queen Nagamati boasts of her looks, Hiraman tells her of the beauty of Padmini of Simhala island. Nagamati feels jealous and orders the parrot to be put to death. Hiraman, however, is hidden by a well-wisher. When produced before Ratna Sen, he narrates his tale and repeats what he had told Nagamati about the beauty of Padmini. Hearing of the beauty of Padmini, Ratan Sen falls in love with her and decides to win Padmini for himself. For this mission he puts on the robes of a mendicant and, accompanied by 16,000 loyal soldiers, sets out on his way to Simhala. The journey is hazardous. Gajapati, the king of Kalinga, places a ship at the disposal of Ratan Sen and his companions. (Such names as Gajapati, Narapati, Ashvapati etc. used by Jayasi were in currency till the twelfth century, and are found in ancient inscriptions). Ratan Sen and his companions sail to Simhala. There, with the blessings of Siva and Parvati, and other gods of the Hindu pantheon, Ratan Sen is able to have a glimpse of Padmini in the temple, and swoons on seeing her dazzing beauty.

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Ultimately Ratan Sen succeeds in winning the hand of the fair Padmini. Meanwhile, Nagamati sends messages of pangs of separation to Ratan Sen and he feels home-sick. After several adventures including a ship-wreck, Ratan Sen and his 16,000 companions, who had also married as many of Padmini's friends, return to Chittor. Back in his own realm, Ratan Sen, with his two queens, Nagamati and Padmini, lives happily. They bear him a son each, named Naga Sen and Kamal Sen respectively. All this is contained in the first part of *Padmavat*. The second part starts with expulsion by Ratan Sen of Ragho Chetan, a Tantric astrologer, from Chittor. This Ragho Chetan, had been given a golden bangle by Padmini. Feeling insulted by the behaviour of Ratan Sen, Ragho Chetan goes to Sultan Alauddin of Delhi, and tells him of the beauty of Padmini of Chittor. His object is to arouse Alauddin to invade Chittor, defeat Ratan Sen, and possess Padmini. This would not only avenge the wrong done to him by Ratan Sen but also get him the other golden bangle from Padmini. Hearing of the great unparalleled beauty of Padmini, Alauddin sends messengers and demands that Ratan Sen present Padmini to him and take whatever part of his domains he wants. When Ratan Sen spurns his offer, Alauddin invades Chittor. The seige, which is on for eight years, is unsuccessful. However, hearing that Delhi is endangered by a foreign invader, Alauddin decides to rush back to Delhi and negotiates a treaty with Ratan Sen. The Chittor ruler's loyal chiefs Gora and Badal oppose the treaty. But Ratan Sen overrules them. As a result Alauddin becomes a guest of Ratan Sen and in that capacity he is able to get a glimpse of Padmini. He is captivated and plays foul. So, while he is being seen off, Alauddin makes Ratan Sen a prisoner and holds him as a hostage. It is his loyal Gora and Badal who adopt a clever strategem to smuggle 1600 soldiers into Delhi to get Ratan Sen released. They succeed in whisking him away. Alauddin's forces give a hot chase. Gora stays behind with 1000 men to keep them engaged, while Badal and others take Ratan Sen back to Chittor. On reaching his capital Ratan Sen hears of the

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insulting overtures made during his captivity by Alauddin and Raja Dev Pal of Kumbhalner to Padmini. To take revenge, he attacks Dev Pal's citadel. There is bitter fighting. Dev Pal is killed, and Ratan Sen himself is mortally wounded. He returns to Chittor—to die. Both Nagamati and Padmini immolate themselves. While this is happening, Alauddin attacks Chittor again. After bitter fighting, he is able to capture Chittor, but a Chittor without Padmini or Padmavat or any of its inhabitants.

It would be seen from the above that Malik Muhammad Jayasi has used all the traditional themes of Indian folklore *e.g.* the role played by a clever parrot, falling in love after hearing of the beauty of a princess, sending of messages through a bird, meeting of the lover and beloved in a temple, sea voyage, storm, cyclone, the destruction of ships, donning the garb of a mendicant for getting possession of the beloved, the divine blessings of Siva and Parvati to the true seeker after his being tested, separation from the beloved, description of Simhala island, jealousy between two co-wives, prophecy etc.

Jayasi's poem is written in the vernacular dialect of his time with an admixture of commonly used Persian words and idioms. He has also followed the rules of Hindi poetry and, as was common in Eastern India, used, with considerable effect, the *doha* and *chaupayi* metres. He was also responsible for some innovations. The story of Padmavat, it may be added, has used some facts or events of history, *e.g.* the seige of Chittor by Alauddin. But Jayasi has mixed this event with several elements from other stories.

The story of Padmavati, as written by Jayasi, is not a mere romance. The poet has given the story a spiritual and religious colour. He has made it an allegory. Ratan Sen is supposed to be the soul, Chittor the body of man, parrot Hiraman the *guru* and Padmini symbolising wisdom. Alauddin represents delusion. All the striving have been gone through by Ratan Sen, because it has to culminate in the union between the beloved (God) and

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the lover, or *bhakta* pining for the beloved, their union being like the water of the cloud merging into that in the ocean. As the water in the cloud is keen to make its way to merge into the ocean, it comes to the earth through rains and, through rivers, find its way to the ocean. Nature in Jayasi's work is also only a reflection of the divine, ever keen to merge into Him.

The following extracts from the translation by Sir George A. Grierson and Pandit Sudhakara Dwivedi of *Padmavat* will give some idea of Jayasi's excellence as a poet :

"When a man approacheth this land, 'tis as though he approacheth Kailasa, the mount of heaven. Dense mango-groves lie on every side, rising from the earth to the very sky. Each tall tree exhaleth the odours of mount Malaya, and the shade covereth the world as though it were the night. The shade is pleasant with its Malaya breeze ; e'en in the fiery month of Jyestha [May-June] 'tis cool amidst it. It is as though night cometh from that shade and as though from it cometh the greenness of the sky. When the wayfarer cometh thither suffering from the heat he foregetteth his trouble in his blissful rest, and whoso hath found this perfect shade, returneth ne'er again to bear the sun rays.

So many and so dense are these groves, that I cannot tell their end. The whole six seasons of the year do they flower and fruit, as though it were always spring.

There dwell the birds, singing in many tongues, and sporting joyfully as they look upon these nectar branches. At dawn the honey suckers are fragrant, and the turtle dove cries out. "Tis thou and only thou" (*ek a-i tu hi*). The emerald parroquets sportively rejoice, and the rock-pigeons cry *kurkur* and fly about. The hawk-cuckoo crieth for its beloved, and the skulking warbler shouted *tuhin khi. Kuhu kuhu* ever crieth the cuckoo, while the king-crow speaketh in many tongues. 'Tyre, tyre' [*dahi, dahi*] crieth the milkmaid bird, while the green pigeon plaintively telleth its tale of woe. The peacock's cry *kun kun* sounded sweet to the ear, and loudly caw the crows.

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Filling the orchards, sitteth every bird that hath a name, and each praiseth the Creator in his own tongue.

Referring to *Padmavat* as "an allegory describing the search of the soul for the true wisdom, and the trials and temptations that beset it on its course". Sir George A. Grierson says that "Malik Muhammad Jayasi's ideal of life was high, and throughout the work of the Muslim ascetic, there run veins of the broadest charity and of sympathy with those higher spirits among his Hindu fellow countrymen who were groping in the dark for that light of which many obtained more than a passing glimpse".

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RASKHAN

Bala Krishna Rao

It is indeed ironical that so little should be known about a poet like Raskhan whose work is so well known. He is, of course, far from being the only famous poet whose life-story oscillates between legend and history, but few poets of the period to which he belongs, and whose verse has gained anything like the popular affection which Raskhan's poetry has achieved, have left fewer footprints behind.

Even the name Raskhan has been the subject of controversy. Was it Raskhan or Raskhani or Ras Khan ? What is known is that Raskhan (by which name we shall refer to him, if only because it is the most widely accepted) was a Muslim who was born at a place called Pihani in the modern Hardoi district of Uttar Pradesh. What may also be said to be more or less accepted by all is that he came of an aristocratic and widely respected family of Saiyads, the *Khan* honorific being no more than a reminder of an honour bestowed on a distinguished ancestor by the monarch. (It is, however, the view of several scholars that the Khan at the end of the name was the customary honorific used by Pathans and that Raskhan was in fact a Pathan.) In either case, whether he was a scion of a Saiyad family or a Pathan, there is little controversy about his full name having being Saiyad Ibrahim—though the reasons for there not being much controversy on that point is only the absence of enough data for serving as a base for controversy.

There is no record of his year of birth. Conjectures, therefore, have to be based on whatever material can be found. Such material is available in the 252 *Vaishnavon-ki-Varta,* the *Bhaktamala,* the *Shiva Singh Saroj* and Raskhan's own works, and on the basis of this material Raskhan is believed to have been born

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some time from 1590 to 1615 Vikrami, i.e. between 1533 and 1558 A.D. it is risky to try to pin-point the date of our poet's birth any more sharply.

Raskhan may or may not have belonged to a royal family as some scholars believe his reference to *Badsa-bans* in his famous *doha* in the *Prem- Vatika* but, as we have noted above, there is little room for doubt that he was well born. It is a safe enough assumption, therefrom, that his early education was sound and thorough. Also, his works give unmistakable evidence of a rich and varied working vocabulary and mastery of language and idiom. They also show beyond question that he not only knew Hindu mythology exceedingly well but had also a more than nodding acquaintance with the Sanskrit language. In fact it is obvious that he knew Sanskrit very well.

At some stage of his early life Raskhan appears to have left his home town and gone to Delhi. We do not know why he went to Delhi any more than we know when he went there, but what we do know is that bitter disillusionment, frustration and sorrow were in store for him in the capital. Says Raskhan in the *Prem-Vatika* (composed in or about 1614 A.D.) :

Dekhi gadar hit Sahibi, Dilli nagar masan,
Chhinahin Badsa-bans-ki, thasak chhori Raskhan.
Prem-niketan Sribanahin, ai Govardhan dham,
Lahyau saran chit chahi kai, Jugal sarup Islam.
Tori manini tain hiyo, phori mohini man,
Premdeva-ki-chhabihi lakhi, bhaye Miyan Raskhan.

These *dohas* clearly furnish autobiographical details. Without entering into a maze of academic discussions, interpretations and controversies we can safely understand from these couplets that Raskhan saw Delhi reduced to a shambles due to the struggles for the throne, and in sheer disgust gave up in a moment the pride of his blue blood. And turning away from the alluring damsels to whom he had until then been attracted, he came away to Braja.

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The 252 *Vaishnavon-ki-Varta* to which reference has been made above, records some facts respecting Raskhan in the 218th *varta*. According to it Raskhan was a Pathan who lived in Delhi and was deeply in love with the handsome son of a bania. He was so much in love with the bania's son that he would follow him like a shadow, partake of what the lad left untasted in his plate and at all times serve him like a slave. Society frowned upon Raskhan and people derided him. One day he happened to overhear a conversation between some Vaishnavas when he passed by the spot where they were sitting and talking. One of them was saying, "One should love God as Raskhan loves that bania boy". "What were you saying about me ?" Raskhan stopped and asked the Vaishnavas, and they told him what they were saying. "But one must see the Lord" said Raskhan, "before one can love him." The Vaishnavas handed him a picture of Srinathji. Raskhan looked at the picture and swore that he would not touch a morsel of food until he saw that face. Immediately he mounted his horse and made for Vrindavan where he went from temple to temple and looked at each idol. But he did not see the likeness of that picture. Then he went to the shrine of Srinathji, donning a deceptive garb. The high priest was, however, not deceived, and he had Raskhan thrown out. He then went away and lay at Govind Kund, shunning food and drink and pining for a *darshan* of Srinathji. His devotion at length bore fruit and Srinathji not only gave Raskhan his *darshan* but also directed the Goswamiji to accept Raskhan as his disciple. Raskhan from that moment went on becoming more and more engrossed in the object of his devotion and "composed many a *kirtan, kavita* and *doha.*"

Of course the 252 *Vaishnavon-ki-Varta* is not history and what it says can only be accepted after examination. But what may safely be taken to be correct is that Raskhan was a well-educated and cultured young man about town who was devoted to the pleasures of the flesh and was of a romantic disposition, that something caused him to leave Delhi and seek solace at the feet

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of Srinathji in Vrindavan and that he became a disciple of Vitthalnathji.

Regarding his romatic entanglements of early life there are two main stories : one, that he was in love with the son of a bania and, the other, that he had lost his heart to a lady who was haughty and proud and difficult to please. One story is that he suddenly made up his mind to become a *bhakta* of Sri Krishna as a result of being overwhelmed by a perusal of a Persian translation of *Srimadbhagavata*. Yet another story is that on the way to the Holy Land in the company of other Haj pilgrims Raskhan made a halt at Vrindavan and suddenly decided never to leave that spot and spend the rest of his life at the feet of Sri Krishna.

A recent research scholar has questioned what has always been taken for granted, viz. that Raskhan abjured Islam and turned a Hindu before, or in the process of, becoming a Vaishnava devotee. There seems, however, to be little more than academic interest in this matter. For whether or not Raskhan went through the formality of giving up Islam and embracing Hinduism, there is not the slightest room for doubt that from a worldly person he turned into a *bhakta*, and an important enough Vaishnava to find honourable mention in the *Bhaktamala* and the 252 *Vaishnavon-ki-Varta*. A fuller tribute than the one in the *Bhaktamala* has been paid to Raskhan in the more recent *Nav Bhaktamala* of Goswami Radhacharan, and another handsome tribute has been paid to him along with several other Muslim poets of Hindi by Bharatendu Harishchandra. These, however, add nothing to our knowledge of Raskhan's life-story.

The date of Raskhan's death also is a matter of conjecture. Scholars, however, are generally agreed that he must have passed away some time in the first quarter of the seventeenth century.

Raskhan wrote no epic, nor was he the author of any other variety of long poetic composition. He composed only stray

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lyrics. The only 'book' he has left behind is the *Prem-Vatika,* but even that is a string of *dohas* rather than a sustained work. In the 53 couplets it comprises Raskhan has given us a poetic dissertation on the essence of *bhakti,* realised as love. The design may be said to be that of Pope's *Essay on Man.* Like Pope's work, Raskhan's *Prem-Vatika* is also a sequence of couplets which are also complete units in themselves. But there the parallel ends, for nothing could be farther from Pope's cold, steely sharpness than Raskhan's inspired lyricism. If Pope's couplet is a shining, finely cut diamond, Raskhan's is a short snatch of a love song. The thought-content is part and parcel of Raskhan's poetic rapture ; the lucidity of the style is evidence of the single-mindedness of the poet's devotion. Of course it is proof also of his mastery of his craft and of the language. The rest of Raskhan's verse consists only of stray pieces, mostly in the *savaiya* metre, which have been collected and published by various scholars under various titles. It cannot, however, be said for certain that every poem that is popularly ascribed to him was actually composed by him, nor that every poem composed by him must have seen the light of day.

Worthy of note is the somewhat intriguing fact that whereas compilers of sectarian tracts have unhesitatingly included Raskhan's name in the most distinguished galaxy of Vaishnava *bhaktas,* historians of Hindi literature have, while giving him an honoured place as a poet, kept him out of their lists of *bhakta*-poets. Obviously this is not due to any delicacy they might have felt on the ground of his being a Muslim. If any delicacy was to be felt it should have been felt by the authors of such works as the 252 *Vaishnavon-ki-Varta, Bhaktamala* etc. rather than by historians of literature. Raskhan was fully steeped in the *bhakti* tradition and was thoroughly acquainted with the esoteric principles underlying the *bhakti* cult. His life too was in very respect that of a *bhakta.* His poetry is replete with Krishna's name and his deeds, and it breathes devotion to Krishna and renunciation of earthly pursuits.

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What, then, are the features of his poetry which distinguish it from the poetry of those of the *bhakta*-poets whom the scholars have always labelled as such? One distinction is that unlike most of the other *bhakta*-poets Raskhan composed but few songs. Jayadeva and Vidyapati, to mention but two *Krishna-bhakta* poets, provide a sharp contrast to Raskhan in this respect. He revels in descriptions of *Krishnaleela* as they did, but he composes *kavitas* and *savaiyas* instead of *padas*. Unlike many of the *bhakta*-poets, again, Raskhan is not interested in proselytizing. He had no use for denominational or sectarian divisions of religious faith. He owed allegiance to no camp and asked none to follow him. Utterly unconscious of self, without fear and without ambition, asking nothing of the world and withholding nothing from God, Raskhan went through life drunk, as it were, with the love of Sri Krishna. His poetry breathes his philosophy of the sheer ecstasy of love, at once the end and the means to that end.

The 252 *Vaihnavon-ki-Varta* makes mention of Raskhan's connection with the *Pushtimargi* branch of Vaishnava *bhaktas*, but in one respect he strikes a rather odd and lonely figure in the company of *Pushtimargi bhaktas* by almost totally focussing his attention on the amorous sports of the youthful Krishna of Vrindavan and ignoring, more or less, Krishna's earlier life, the childhood pranks which inspired so many of the Vaishnava poets. Nothing else touched or appealed to Raskhan so much as the image of Krishna and the belles of Vrindavan and he poured out his heart in singing of the loves of the Gopikas and their idol. Love, pure and simple and utterly uninhibited, being his theme, and the traditional *kavita* and *savaiya* being his favourite metres, it is perhaps not surprising that Raskhan should have come to be regarded by scholars as a poet who was also a great *bhakta* rather than a *bhakta* who was also a great poet.

Another proof, if proof were needed, of Raskhan having been a single-minded *bhakta* and not a poet whose ambition was to shine as one, is furnished by the fact that he not only

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made no effort to write anything but these stray lyrical pieces, he did not even care to write on any but the one aspect of Krishna's life and personality which he adored.

Poetry came to him easily and naturally ; he wrote because he had to, because it was an irresistible urge, his natural and spontaneous mode of self-expression. There is, therefore, an easy grace, a natural flow in his verse which no amount of practice could give one. Consequently, too, the principal ornament of his poetry is its lack of adornment. Those who seek in Raskhan's poetry verbal and metrical mastery will be amply rewarded, but they will not help observing that there is never any attempt to embellish or to strain after a figure of speech. Such figures of speech as are to be met with are achieved effortlessly and seem to be the natural result of the happy blending of matter and manner which is the triumph of Raskhan's virtuosity.

His marvellous gift of describing the amorous sports of Krishna and the Gopikas as vividly as if he were broadcasting a running commentary on what was taking place before his very eyes, has given rise to the legend that the Lord actually indulged in these games to enable his devotee to witness them. The theme has attracted many, but few have achieved such a happy combination of graphic detail and lyric fervour. That is his principal glory, his forte, and in this matter, if in none other, he stands unsurpassed.

Adored by the masses and honoured by the scholars, Raskhan was a poet the like of whom was never known before or since. He discarded the *pada* in which Surdas and the other Krishna bhakta poets had sung and re-fashioned the old-time *savaiya* and *kavita,* those favourite metres of the ancient bards of the early years of Hindi poetry, and turned them into vehicles of the most mellifluous and soulful lyricism.

His place among Hindi poets is unique and unchallengeable. He has left but a slender volume of verse behind, but the poems it contains will last as long as the Hindi language does.

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TUKARAM

Prabhakar Machwe

The great Marathi saint poet Tukaram, of the seventeenth century, is considered by the masses in Maharashtra as the pinnacle of the temple of *Bhakti,* of which the foundation was laid by Jnaneshwar or Jnanadeva. Unlettered and not having the least pretention to scholarship, not even belonging to the higher caste, his father being a pedlar by profession, this rustic mystic composed thousands of exquisite lyrics. The metre he chose for such spontaneous outpourings, was *Abhanga,* a run on couplet with three and a half feet, with the first three rhyming. The popular adage is :

Ovi of Jnanesh, *Abhangas* of Tukaram,
Sloka of Vamana and *Arya* of Moropant.

Nobody could excel in these particular verse patterns mentioned against each of these four devotional poets, though many others used them freely.

As in the case of many other saints in the mediaeval age, the exact dates of the birth and death of Tukaram are a matter of controversy amongst scholars. Some of the scholars give the date of Tukaram's birth as follows :—

Rajwade	—	1568 A.D.
Bhave	—	1577 A.D.
Pangarkar	—	1608 A.D.
Family chronicles	—	1598 A.D.

The date of Tukaram's 'ascent to heaven' is unanimously accepted as *Phalgun Vaidya* 2, in the year 1650 A.D.

He was born in Dehu, near Poona, in a low caste family of traders, which was very poor. His father's name was Bolhoba

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and mother's name was Kanakai. His family name is mentioned in some records as Ambite, and in others More. The first twenty-one years of his life were uneventful. He was unsuccesstul as a trader and tortured in his married life, having taken two wives. The second one, Jijai was the nagging type. His parents died when he was young. The first wife Rakhumabai died for want of food in a dire famine. His son Santu did not live long. He wandered in vain to various places, but his heart was not in business. In 1619 A.D. came the illumination, when he was initiated by one Babaji Chaitanya in a dream.

With this Guru's blessings his life was transformed. Now he left his mundane trade and started performing *Kirtans* at Dehu, Lohegaon and Poona. His deity was Vithoba of Pandharpur. As he became more and more popular amongst his devotees, there arose a group of malicious and mischievous critics and calumniators. They showered tirade of baseless allegations and charges on him. Rameshwarabhatta's objection was : how could a person from the low caste imitate and perform *Kirtan,* which was a prerogative of Brahmins ? Mambaji Gosavi was jealous of Tukaram's poetic genius. He tried to propagate that it was Mambaji's compositions which Tukaram plagiarized and sang. They even conspired to throw away his *Gatha,* the manuscript of 3000 poems, in the nearby river Indrayani. But they all miraculously came up. Those who tried to drown Tukaram's works were themselves drowned in popular resentment and neglect.

Tukaram is supposed to have met Shivaji and Samartha Ramdasa also. But these are more or less legendary beliefs. When his end drew nearer, he invoked Vishnu, and believers think that he was taken by God to heaven, bodily. There is no *samadhi* or memorial at the place of his death. There is a temple in Dehu, where *Varkaris* the sect which follows these saints, make an annual pilgrimage on foot, collectively singing and chanting, along with the Dindi or palanquin.

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Tukaram as a poet of devotion, has charmed the poor, illiterate masses of Maharashtra for the last four centuries. Tukaram has left a distinguished galaxy of disciples and poets, from various castes and professions, Niloba and Rajai and so on. Tukaram's strength as a poet lies in his unornamented language, almost like a straight cry of spiritual anguish, full of sincerity and simplicity. This directness and appeal to all levels, cuts across all divisions social or economic, in the Marathi speaking society.

Dr. R. D. Ranade writes about him in his *Mysticism in Maharashtra,* reprinted as *Pathway to God in Marathi Literature* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, 1961, page 282-83) :

> "There is no other instance in the whole galaxy of Marathi saints, barring perhaps Namdeva, which can be regarded as illustrative of this human element which we find in Tukaram. Jnanadeva is a light that dazzles too much by its brilliance. Tukaram's light is an accommodative, steady, incremental light which does not glitter too much but which soothes our vision by giving it what it needs. It is for this that we say that the humanistic and personistic element in Tukaram is more pre-dominent than in any other saint."

Acharya Vinoba Bhave made a selection of Tukaram's Hymns and wrote an introduction to them in Marathi, in 1968. Here is an excerpt from his Introduction :

> "The respect given to Tulasidas in Hindi provinces, is what Tukaram is given in Maharashtra. Their songs have reached every house. Yet there is a great difference. Tulasidas is like a Guru to the villagers; Tukaram for us is like mother.
>
> "Tukaram was not a scholar. He must have repeated thousand times the sayings and songs of Jnanadeva,

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Namdeva, Eknath and Kabir. He confessed that he was illiterate, amongst scholars. Yet his words have a power which is unprecedented in Marathi. It attracts and touches the heart of a common man. Tukaram's poems are like flowing Ganga, it purifies everyone, it is easily accessible. For advising children, the mother has not to have training in linguistics. The same is true of Tukaram."

There are many books in Marathi on Tukaram. The late P.M. Lad was writing a biography which he could not complete. But he edited the authorized version of Tukaram's *Gatha*. The works of Dr. V. B. Kolate and Dr. H. R. Divekar give a very good estimate in Hindi of Tukaram's life and work. Prof. G. B. Sardar's book in Marathi is by for the best critical estimate. Tukaram is also valued because of the social content in his poems, his criticism of false gurus and fake traders in religion. Recently a novel has been written on him in Marathi.

Rabindranath Tagore translated Tukaram's poems, which are referred to in Jyotirindranath Tagore's *Bombai Prabas*. There are French translation of Tukaram's poems published by UNESCO. In English, besides the *Psalms of Maratha Saints* by Macnicol, recently my book on Tukaram's poems has been published by United Writers, Calcutta.

Tukaram is a remarkable saint poet; he is very simple, yet very deep. He uses sometimes slang and low language, but he is forthright and so modern. He has nothing to hide, his poetry is so transparent. Emotion and thought content are fused to a heightened degree of mystic vision.

Ten *Abhangas* of Tukaram are given here with their proximate literal translations :

(1) *(Maran majhe maran gele)*

My death died, I was made immortal
Identity erased, Name and address gone

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Body consciousness desolated, Flood came and went
Life remained patient, Tuka says, real Festival
Of the basic, loan repayed.

(2) (*Taruvar Bijapoti*)

The tree is in the womb of the seed
The seed remains after the tree is no more

So it has happened to you and me
The one contains the other

The ripple on the water, Water the body of the ripple,
Tuka says, the shadow of reflections vanishes where it begins.

(3) (*Stavuniya nara*)

Praising man soiled whole life
Forgetting Narayana All sins followed
He who gifted life His honour defied,
Tuka says, such words whosoever listen, be deaf.

(4) (*Gajarachi pungi*)

Like pipes carved out of carrots are these new Yogis
They cram a lot but they only accumulate Ego
Knowledge little, pride great
Tuka says, such hypocrites should be beaten and shoed

(5) (*Sukh pahata javapade*)

Pleasure like a bareley grain, Pain like a mounatin
Remember Him, remember, Follow what the saints say
Half of life stolen by sleep, childhood, old age, disease
Tuka look ahead, Don't wear a Yoke and move in a rut.

(6) (*Kam nahin kam*)

No work, no work, Look I am workless
All actions useless, Just looking I sit
Meaningless attachment world cries at this fun
And suddenly, suddenly Tuka detached from the world.

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(7) (*Nahi santapan milt te hati*)

Sainthood is not available in bazaar,
One has to wander in forests and dens.
It cannot be bought by piles of wealth,
It is neither in the sky nor in the underworld
Tuka says, it is received by paying one's life
Otherwise all else is bragging.

(8) (*Nabhomaya jale jal*)

The water has become full of sky,
All differences are lost in one
What is the use of dissecting water
Its ripples subside in the same water.
Who will free here whom ?
One is binding oneself
Tuka says, an age is over,
Setting has reached rising.

(9) (*Tu majhi mauli*)

You are my mother,
You are my shadow.
I am intensely waiting, O Panduranga,
You are my only one,
The elder and younger all in one.
You are my kith and kin.
Tuka says my life is with you,
Without you all directions are deserted.

(10) (*Amhi jato amuchya ganva*)

We go back to our village,
Please take our Ram Ram.
Yours and mine this meeting only,
From here our lives part with each other.
Now you keep that mercy,
I bow to your feet
Sing Rama-Krishna, Rama-Krishna,
Tuka is leaving for the heaven

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SAMARTHA RAMDAS

Prabhakar Machwe

Sri Samartha Ramdas Swami is one of the five most revered saint-poets of Maharashtra, the other four being Jnaneswar, Namadev, Tukaram and Eknath. He is well-known for his epic work *Dasbodh* and for his frank and forthright criticism of the social conditions in his time. His style is full of vigour and virility, almost oratorial and rhetorical. He composed verses e.g. *Manache Shlok* (slokas addressed to oneself) which became almost household songs. He uses a conversational and dramatic idiom. There is profound devotion and ardent fervour for his deity and religion. He founded several *maths* and temples of Rama and Maruti (Hanuman). He met Shivaji twice and legend goes that Ramdas was a kind of guru and mentor to Shivaji.

In Marathawada, a part of Maharashtra which was previously under the Nizam of Hyderabad, there is a small village named Jamb. Three and a half centuries ago, a *Kulkarni* (tax-collector) named Suryajipant Thosar lived there ; he was a great devotee of Surya, the Sun-God. He was blessed by the Sun-god with two sons through his wife Ranubai named Gangadhar and Narayan. In their family the worship of Rama had been followed traditionally for many generations. Narayan was born on *Chaitra Navami* of Saka 1530 (1608 A.D.), which was the *Ramanavami.* Young Narayan after thirty-six years became Ramdas, and later well-known as *Samarth* (the Powerful or Efficient). The cult of his disciples is called *Ramdasi Panth.*

There are many legends describing young Narayan as very learned, strong and naughty. As his father was a holy man, many people used to come to him to get the *Mantropadesa,* the divine spell. Young Narayan requested his father to bless him with the *mantra,* but Suryajipant gave it to the elder brother. After

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the death of his father, Narayan begged of his elder brother who also did not oblige him with the *mantra*. There is a line in *Dasbodh* (19 : 6 : 6) which says that even "brothers do not help brothers". All these circumstances led to his becoming self-reliant and also a lover of quietude. He began to shun family bonds.

The legend given by Dinkar Swami, a disciple of Ramdas in *Swanubhava Dinkar,* corroborate the divine inspiration and benediction Ramdas received in early age. When he was eleven, a messenger of the King came to his house, when Gangadhar and Suryaji were both not at home and forcibly dragged Narayan to a road outside the village. He saw that a couple of very brilliant persons were sitting in a palanquin, surrounded by several attendants. These divine persons in human garb called the young boy and asked him in some Rajputi (probably Hindi) dialect—"Where is your father ?" When Narayan said that the father had gone out, he was called to come closer to the palanquin. His head was patted and a letter was given to him to be delivered to the father. As soon as Narayan received the letter his condition was totally changed. He began trembling, could not stand, became spell-bound. He suddenly saw the *Rama Panchayatan* : all the four brothers and Hanuman too. There was a strong gale and Rama gave the advice in the form of *Mahavakya* and left the young Narayan in the hands of Hanuman. At the same time a lightning-like robe was wrapped around Narayan, giving him a letter in one hand and the arrow (*Rama Bana*) in the other. Rama disappeared. The father and elder brother searched for Narayan. He was found in an unconscious state near a grove of trees outside the village. As soon as the letter was seen by the father, he went into *Samadhi.* Even Gangadhar underwent the same experience, dedicated his 'pen' to God and left his tax-collector's work. Narayan became dumb for one year and after this period of silence, began to speak in verses.

Another legend says that at an early age of twelve his marriage was arranged. But he had taken a vow of remaining a celibate

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for his whole life. So when young Narayan was ushered to the marriage-dias and as the Brahmins shouted *Shub Mangal Savadhan* (It is an auspicious occasion, let all know), Narayan took the word *Savadhan* literally to mean 'Beware' and ran away from that place without even casting a glance on the bride. He left his home and all the family ties for good.

He went to Takli near Nasik, where he spent twelve years in penance and then travelled for twelve more years. Thus at the age of thirty six he was recognized by the world as Swami Ramdas. Not much is known about his hard penance and disciplined meditation, nor about his travels and pilgrimages. He must have seen and visited many holy places in the South. He was very fond of music as he composed his songs in several *Ragas*. It is a general belief that Ramdas was an incarnation of Hanuman who is one of the Acharyas of music, according to Puranas. From the writings of Ramdas one can see that he not only knew music and other fine arts, but was also a keen observer of nature. After completing his pilgrimage Ramdas lived in Brahmaranya in Mahabaleshwar at the source of the river Krishna. He travelled on the banks of this river where he found a temple in Bahe village, without any idol. So he brought up the image from under the water and installed it. In this way he established many *Maths,* renovated many temples and spread the message of the devotion to Rama and Hanuman. He used to spend his days as a recluse, in mountain caves, where he composed his great work *Dasbodh*. From 1644 to 1681 he spent 37 years of his life in the work of organizing temples and propagating religious spirit. The last four or five years of his life were spent in Rajayoga when it is said that Shivaji accepted his discipleship. Shivaji died in 1680, Ramdas on February 2, 1681 at Sajjangarh, where his temple and *Samadhi* are still worshipped as holy places.

Ramdas was a prolific writer. Besides his *Dasbodh* which is an epic of 200 *samasas,* each consisting of 20 verses, he composed *Manache Shlok,* many *abhangas* and *padas* and *Karunashtak.*

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Dasbodh is his *magnum opus,* which expounds the philosophy of devotion or *Bhaktiyoga.* It contains discussion on several problems connected with *Bhakti, Jnan* and *Vairagya.* For *Bhakti* it is necessary to have a deity (which in the case of Ramdas was Rama and Hanuman) and the deity needs a temple and along with temple there are festivals and many other connected things. In the beginning there are invocations to Ganapati, Sarasvati and descriptions of a saint and a great poet. Along with that he describes the attributes of a proper listener. He goes on discussing the ethical problems of goodness and evil, duties in a family, filial piety and marital loyalty, and then discusses *Devakarana* and *Rajakarana* (the affairs of god and the affairs of politics).

Ramdas is a Vaishnava devotee of Rama, belonging to the *Varakari Panth* in Maharashtra—a group of devotional people who did not believe in caste-distinction and worked for the unity of Hindu society against alien opposition. Ramdas's association with Shivaji added greater determination and discipline in keeping the vows of celibacy and service to the people. Legend says that Shivaji gave 200 *hons* (golden coins) as annuity to many of the Ramdasi temples. Ramdas had Kalyan as his most devoted disciple. He had also Venu and Akka as two female devotees. Venu has some poetry to her credit; she seems to have composed *Kirtans* also.

Dasbodh discusses the ultimate problems of metaphysics and epistemology in a popular manner. The body is castigated as an obstruction in the way to truth. It is to be used only as a tool. The world, for Ramdas, is not an illusion, but a battlefield. He discusses the relationship of body and mind, the individual and his family, and prescribes devotion as the only way to attain salvation. Emancipation from the cycle of births is not easy; there are many hurdles on the way. He discusses them in detail : how to conquer the ego, how to control lethargy and slovenliness. Then he goes on to describe nine kinds of *Bhakti.* He gives in detail the importance of finding the real Guru, who can

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help the devotee to reach his siddhi. In the path to self-realization the conflict between duties to the family and to God, the contradiction of this-worldliness and other-worldliness has to be resolved. Whether action preceded knowledge or otherwise is another problem. According to Ramdas, there is no inherent dichotomy between the two : one can be worldly-wise and active in the material stature and also spiritual at the same time. Ramdas does not preach renunciation and running away from the world. In fact Ramdas's advocacy of *Balopasana* is almost like worshipping *Wille Zur Macht* (Will to Power).

As far as the poetic qualities of Ramdas are concerned, he is forthright and full of great power. He does not care for linguistic sophistication or decorative figures of speech. In his writings the erotic (*Sringar*) is avoided scrupulously, the heroic (*Vira*) is extolled. His descriptions are very graphic, they are excellent examples of his minute observation of different peoplel and situations. He is very fond of aphorisms and *subhashitas*. He uses freely words from other languages. Even Persian and Urdu words are used in abundance. He coins new words and changes many colloquial idioms with a new meaning and their local habitation suddenly becomes universal and acquires charm. He does not care much for the rigidity of Sanskrit prosody. He is excessively repetitive, may be because his poetry is mostly 'addressed' to an audience, which needed to be coaxed or subjected to continuous hammering. There is a bulk of writing under the name of Ramdas of stray lyrics, hymns, an incomplete *Ramayana, Anandabhauvan* (a description of the land and conditions), *Panchikaran, Saptasamasi* and *Akmeram,* three philosophical treatises and *Sagunadhyana, Nirgunadhyana* and *Manaspuja,* three small verse-books on ways of meditation and worship. His poetry comes closest to *kirtana,* a kind of discourse accompanied with music. So it has its own portions devoted to popular exposition filled with anecdotes and parables. Yet the impact of his writing is tremendous. Much of the militancy of Hindu revivalism in Maharashtra can be attributed to Ramdas's verses. His

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descriptions of the wanton destruction done by alien invaders are provocative. Shivaji respected this saint and savant. According to a legand Ramdas gave political precept to Shivaji.

The English rendering of a few poems of Ramdas are given here :

Description of famine at Panhalgarh fort :

Costs rose very high at Panhalgarh
Then whole world came to sorrow due to it

When will god be merciful one does not know
Even after great searching not a single grain

Sold cattle, clothes, utensils
The priests sold silken wraps and dhoties

Sold all the kitchen pots, mortar and pestles
Sold even the bamboos and fences

So many castes, so many negotiations
Yet no work gets successfully done

Sold so many swords and sheaths
Sold shields and lances, horses and camels

Sold ornaments of so many women
Of rich and beautiful ladies

Even under such stress and duress
It was He who protected Samartha.

His advice to Shivaji is given in a poem :

As the body is decorated with good dress and ornaments
Let the internal be decorated with reason and thought.
A beautiful brilliant body, well dressed and decorated
is not proper without the cleverness within.

.....

One should not be short-tempered, one should be patient

One should not trust braggarts and liars and lazy persons

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Take hold of every opportunity, never miss the chance
If one waits for the chance politics is changed
Excess should be avoided, every point exploited
One should not be too haughty, one should be reasonable
One should trust in God, in *Tulaja-Bhavani,* yet rely on one's intelligence
One should be ever vigilant, I need not tell more, suggestions are enough.

(*Dasbodh* : 11th *Dashak,* 6th *Samasa*)

Attributes of a fool are described in the following poem :

Many are the attributes of a fool who may be literate
But some are obvious, please listen attentively
One who leave his family and runs after women is a fool
One who takes a harlot as a friend is a fool
One who leaves his family and runs after women is a fool
One who lives in father-in-law's house and marries without enquiring the bride's family-pedigree is a fool.
One who tries to boss without any power is a fool
One who praises oneself, one who has to suffer in one's own land, one who praises only his forefathers is a fool
One who laughs without reason, one who does not listen to wisdom, one who has many enemies is a fool.
One who discards one's own people and befriends the enemy is a fool
One who sleeps in a group of many waking people, one who eats much at another's place is a fool

(*Dasbodh* : Second *Dashak,* first *Samasa*)

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BHADRACHALA RAMADAS

V. Raghavan

It was the time when the Qutub Shahis were ruling in Golconda. Although these rulers were Muslims, they were great patrons of the local language Telugu and the local arts of music and dance. The best of them, Malik Ibrahim patronized Telugu writers and the 'Iburamu' figuring in many Telugu songs is this Malik Ibrahim. His son Muhammad Quli Qutub Shah became attracted to a *devadasi,* proficient in music and dance, named Bhagamati, and named after her as Bagnagar the city which came to be known later as Hyderabad. Later, Kshetragna, a devotee of Muvva Gopala, came to the court of Abdulla Qutub Shah; this poet, music-composer and authority on *Rasa* and *Alamkara sastra* had a contest in the Golconda court on the subject of *Nayika-Nayaka-bhava* with another scholar Tulasimurti and in this connection composed under the patronage of the Padshah and by the grace of Muvva Gopala, 1100 *padas*.[1] Evidently at this time the Padshah of Golconda became much interested in this *Nayika-Nayaka-bhava* which has also much to do with the phase of devotion called *Madhura-bhakti* and music compositions based on it. One of the divines, connected with the court as preceptors, at the *dargah* at Gulbarga of Gezu Daraz, Shahraja or Bada Akbar Shah, also evinced keen interest in the subject and a text entitled *Sringaramanjari* in Telugu and Sanskrit versions was produced on this subject.[2]

In the time of the successor Abud Hasan known as Tani Shah, Hindu-Muslim unity had grown farther ; not only were his

1. See his *pada* in Devagandhari, *Vedukoto*
2. This very erudite work on *Nayika-Nayaka-bhava*, in its Sanskrit version, was discovered and edited by me for the Archaeological Department of Andhra Pradesh, 1951.

See also my article 'Hyderabad as Centre of *Sangita*', Journal of the Music Academy, Madras, XVI. 1945 pp 116—20

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ministers Hindu, the two brothers Akkanna and Madanna, but many Muhammedan officials freely participated in Hindu festivals.

It is this Muhammedan ruler Abul Hasan Tani Shah who figures in the story of Sri Ramadas. It would be necessary to say something about the history of Abul Hasan to understand the background of this ruler in proper perspective. Abdulla Qutab Shah was thinking of giving his daughter in marriage and naturally his thoughts went to the *dargah* of Gezu Daraz at Gulbarga whose divines had always advised the rulers. Shahraja or Bade Akbar Shah was in charge of the dargah at that time ; Abul Hasan, a young boy, who descended on the side of the mother of Abdulla, was studying at the *dargah*. The boy had been under Shahraja's tuition for twelve years. Abdulla took a sudden decision to bestow his daughter on him and later the kingdom also.

Abul Hasan was more popularly known as Tani Shah which means a jovial king. But deep below his gaiety, there was all that he had imbibed in his stay in young age in the religious atmosphere of Gulbarga. The maturity of spirit was due also to the rare experience he had in his dealing with Ramadas, in the sight of Sri Ramachandra which he was blessed with. It is not a matter of wonder that through his *Bhakti* to Rama, Ramadas attained salvation, the wonder is that Ramadas took with him the Muhammedan Ruler.

Dhanyudai Tani Shah neevu
nannu kannayya padamulu kanula
kannavu

So did Ramadas himself exclaim and felicitate Tani Shah on the divine *darshan* with which he was blessed.

The time of Tani Shah is 1674-1699 A.D. Traditionally Kabirdas of Banaras is said, by *Harikatha* performers, to have been the guru of Ramadas but this is not possible as Kabir, a disciple of Ramananda, flourished between 1440 and 1518 A.D. Further there is nothing hazy about the figure of Ramadas who

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is a well known name in Telugu history and literature. All that he wrote, his time, his life, these are all known to us authoritatively, more authoritatively than the life and career of Tyagaraja who lived much nearer our time. We can visit Golconda and see the hill and the place where Ramadas was imprisoned and the hole by which food is said to have been dropped for him.

In 1832 A.D. one Varada Ramadas who described himself as a descendant of our Ramadas, made a representation to Chandulal, Dewan of the Nizam of Hyderabad that he should be appointed to look after the Rama temple at Bhadrachalam and got his request granted. In confirmation of the historicity of the whole story of Ramadas and the Muslim Ruler, we have had the continuing practice of the Nizam of Hyderabad making a grant for the conduct of the festival of the temple of Rama at Bhadrachalam. It was reported in the papers that during the anti-Hindu agitations and activities of Razakars and their leader Kasim Rizvi, the Nizam stopped the grant to the Bhadrachalam temple, but soon realized that it was a wrong act and restored the grant.

Tani Shah had a Brahmin Minister named Madanna. Madanna had a sister Kamamba who was given in marriage to Linganna Mantri. Ramadas was the son of Linganna. His real name was Gopanna. They belonged to the family surnamed Kancharla whose members were spread all over South India. One of the *stotras* written by Ramadas is the *Bhadrachala Dasarathi Satakam* and in this Ramadas gives at the beginning biographical details about himself. They belonged to the place called Nelakondapalli in the former Nizam's dominions. His *gotra* was *Atri*, *Veda Suklayajus* and as stated above, the house-name was *Kancharla.*

Allana Linga mantri sutudu
Atrigotrajudu Adi-sakha
Kancharla Kulodbhavunduna
Prasiddhudanai Bhagavadankitamuga-
yalla kavul nutiyimpa rachiyinchidi

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Gopa-Kavindrudan Jagadvallabha
neeku dasudanu Dasarthi Karunapayonidhi

In this same text he mentions his guru as Raghunatha Bhattacharya:

Acharyula kellu mrokki vinatangudanai
Raghunathabhattarucharyuluku anjaletti.

This guru was a Srivaishnava of the 'Sesha' family.

Because of his *Rama-bhakti,* this Gopanna came to be known as Ramadas. The whole family was devoted to *Bhakti* and its propagation. According to an unpublished document[3], his uncle the Minister Madanna arranged for a Yakshagana troupe to tour from village to village, enacting puranic stories and spreading *Bhakti.* Ramadas continued this tradition, courting the company of *Bhaktas,* arranging for *Bhajanas* and festivals. Ramadas must have had initiation and *Mantropadesa* from some great soul and progressed in the spiritual path to such an extent that he saw Rama in all beings and things, a state which he himself expressed in one of his songs :

Anta Ramamayam, i jagad anta Ramamayam (*Varali*) . . . .

By constantly inviting Bhagavatas and entertaining and attending upon them, Ramadas spent much and gradually became reduced to poverty. Thereupon, through the good offices of his uncle Madanna, he got from the Nawab the Tahsildarship of the *firka* of Bhadrachalam. He was discharging his duties well in this office for some time.

The Rama shrine for which Bhadrachalam was well-known was in a damaged state. Ramadas felt that he should repair the temple and provide the Rama Image here with new jewels. Upto that time Ramadas was prompt in remitting the revenues of his division to the Central Treasury but after his mind turned to the renovation of the Rama shrine, the collections came to be direc-

3. The Machupalle Kaifiat of 1502 A.D. See my *Bhagavata Mela Nataka* in the *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art,* V. Calcutta, 1937 p. 167.

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ted towards the Rama shrine and not to the Padshah's exchequer. In one of his songs on Bhadrachala Rama and His temple there, Ramadas describes the golden pinnacles of the towers of this temple, the bejewelled flagstaff, the tank, the garden, the surrounding shrines, the Agrahara etc. From this song which refers to Bhadrachala as Vaikuntha on earth in this Kali age (*Kali Yuga Vaikunthamu Bhadrachala-nilayamu*), we may see the nature and extent of improvement that Ramadas had effected in the temple. In a further song of lament in *Saveri* that he sang in imprisonment (*Sita Ramaswami na jesina neramuleni*), he asks "What wrong did I do ? Did I make the earrings, the rings for all the ten fingers, the diadem, for myself ? It is for your acceptance, Oh Sita-Rama, that I did all this !" From this again we see that he spent large sums of money on the decorations of the Image of Rama at Bhadrachalam.

The revenues had not been remitted for a long time and notices sent from time to time produced no response. Then the State officials had Ramadas arrested and thrown into the prison in Golconda. That he suffered in the prison for twelve years is mentioned by him in a song of his in *Anandabhairavi* :

Emitiki dayaradu Sri Ramulu nannu
Emitiki rakshimpavu Sri Ramulu
Parulanu ne vedabonu Sri Ramulu
nike karmula sachi yunnanu
parrendentlu aye nedu
bandikhanalena yuntinanu

It was during this twelve years of prison-life to which he had been condemned by the Padshah that Ramadas sang most of his moving songs. Why had Ramadas to suffer so long in this manner, when his own uncle was Minister? Firstly, Minister Madanna could not go out of the way and do anything to save his nephew who had spent state money excessively on the Temple ; nor could the uncle have had that large amount of money

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that his nephew had spent, to be paid to the State and release his nephew.

The State officials must have from time to time beaten Ramadas for the payment of dues. This is clear from the cries of pain that we hear in the *Asaveri* song :

Appappa debbaluku talalera
Ramappa Goppuna nannadukora

Gopanna believed that whatever the treatment he received, Rama always stood by his side armed with *Chakrayudha* (the discus) and he had nothing to be afraid of :

Takku vemi manaku Ramudu Okkadu undavaraku
Prakka toduka Bhagavantudu munu
Chakradhariyai sakutsu nuntaka (*Nadanamakriya*)

Rama alone constituted his wealth and strength ; in happiness or misery he was always with Rama.

Kalimi balami naku ilalo nee vani para pala varinchidi ni palamunchinanu neellamunchinna nee
Pala patiti-nika jalamu cheyaka (*Surati* or *Yaman kalyani*)

Recalling how, in their times of distress, He appeared before Gajendra and Panchali, he asks Rama in a song in *Natakuranji* where He was and why He was not coming to him when he was suffering like that:

Edunnado Bhadradrivasudu
Edunnado napali Ramudu edunnado

"What shall I do if you do not protect me, O Rama, the purpose of whose *avatara* is to protect those who take refuge in you?"

Saranenna janamula pirapira brochedu
Birudu galgina torave O Rama
Paripari vidhamula muralida vinaka
Nannara marachesina Harininne mandu
(*Kambhoji-Katakatanidu*)

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At one moment he lays all his burden on Rama, declaring in a mood of strength "I belong to Rama, why should I be afraid? All my burden is His."

Ramuni varamu makemi vicharamu
Swami neede bharamu Dasarathe jeevadharamu
(*Anandabhairavi*)

"Although in the turn of the wheel of fortune, we now suffer, we have always faith in Rama; why should we resort to any other person for any purpose?"

Ramuni varamainamu
Itaradula ganana cheyamu
Graha gatulaku verava pomu
Maku kaladu Daivanugrahamu
(*Nadanamakriya*)

"Rama, why do you not speak? Are words pieces of gold? Would you be casting away the pearls if you utter a few words? I have never lost the thought of your Name even in my dream."

Paluku bangara mayana kodandapani
Kalalo nee namasmarana marava chakkani Tandri
(*Anandabhairavi*)

Finding Rama silent, he calls upon Sita to speak to Rama on his behalf, in *Nannu brova* (Kalyani) and *Ramachandrulu* (*Asaveri*).

Ramachandrulu napai chalamu
Chesinaru Sitamamma cheppavamma (*Asaveri*)

Finding no improvement in his situation, for a moment he appears in his wailings as if his faith was slipping. "Are you so devoid of grace? Why is Goddess Parvati doing *Japa* of your Name? Why do Prahlada and other devotees have faith in you?"

Adaranaleni nee Nama-mantra-japam
Adrija emani jesira Rama?

In another mood, he regrets that, being in prison, he is not able to perform the worship of Rama in proper form and goes through

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its required details mentally (doing what is called *manasika-puja*) in a song *Rama Rama manasa* in *Kalyani.*

The moment of succour from Rama then arrives. Rama and Lakshmana put on the guise of two employees under Ramadas, enter one night the apartment of Tani Shah, pay him the entire dues that Ramadas owed and ask for a receipt. Tani Shah is stunned. The extra-ordinary effulgence and charm of the two servants overpower Tani Shah. All of a sudden, the dues of several years being paid together, all in gold, at that time of night, the appearance of the two who brought the money, and their disappearance,—all these revolve in Tani Shah's mind and make him decide that two servants are none else than Rama and Lakshmana whom Ramadas had been worshipping. Tani Shah then ran to where Ramadas was imprisoned and reported to him the miraculous *darshan* he had. Ramadas congratulated the King : "Tani Shah ! You are blessed, you have seen face to face Rama whom I am yet to see."

Dhanyudu Tani Shah neevu nannu
Kannayya padamulu kanula
Kannavu

Tani Shah, on his part, expressed his gratitude to Ramadas, loaded him with enormous money, put him on a palanquin and sent him to Bhadrachalam to continue his devotion and service to Rama. To keep guard over his devotee and the riches he was taking, Rama and Lakshmana walked, bow in hand, on either side of the palanquin ? So says Ramadas in his song *Ramudu galadu* in *Nadanamakriya.*

Rama blessed Ramadas too with *darshan* for which Ramadas had been yearning (*Rama nee muddu momu joopara*). In the ecstacy of the sight of Rama, Ramadas sang *Kanti needu Ramula kanukonti needu.* Taking humiliation and honour as equal, deeming as friends even those who subjected him to suffering, Ramadas, exemplifying the Gita-ideal of equanimity—*Tulya-ninda stutih, Tulyo manapamanayoh* and *Tulyo mitraripakshayoh,* became the recipient of the grace of the Lord in full.

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Evaru dooshinchinanemi, mecchi
Evaru bhooshinchinanemi.....
Aparadha mulanenchuvaru maku
upakarulai yunnavaru (Bilahari)

In addition to these songs, as already noted, Ramadas wrote on Sri Rama at Bhadrachala. *Sataka stotra* in Telugu entitled *Dasarathi Sataka,* is considered as one of the best compositions in this class. Ramadas has shown his literary gifts here and worked in many sound effects. "To me Rama alone is God; there is none to equal Him—this I can proclaim by beat of drum placed on the back of the elephant"—When he says this in one of the verses here, Ramadas produces the sound effect of tom-tom by repetition of the syllables 'ndu' and 'du'—

Pandana bheemudu artajana bandhavudu
Ujjavala—bana-toona Kodandakalaprachanda
bhuja-tandava keertikai Ramamurtikin
Rendava sati daivaminka vedanutsun
Kadakatti bherika tanta-tatanta tanta
Nirutambun ajandamuninda mattu-vetandamu
Nekki tsadetanu Dasarathi karunapayonidhi

"My poetry is fit for dedication to God alone, I will not let myself down by employing it for the flattering of man" says he in another verse.

Masakoni reku pandalakoni mauktikamul
Vela posinatlu dur—
Vyasanumu jenti kavyamu duratmula—
Kicchiti mosamayye
Na rachnaku Poota-vritti sukarambuga chekurnatlu
Vak-sudharasamulu chelkan
Padyamuga rangamunandu natimpa vaiya
Santa samunu jenti Bhadragiri Dasarathi
Karunapayonidhi

Ramadas was equipped in Sanskrit also and using twenty-four names of the Lord—Kesava, Narayana etc., he has summarily

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set forth the whole Ramayana story in the form of a prose-poem, a *Choornika.*

Ramadas gained a noteworthy place in the tradition of the galaxy of *Rama-bhaktas.* His songs on Rama spread all over the country. His life, his sufferings and his obtaining in the end the blessing of Rama became a common story among the people. His songs on Rama showed the way to the other great Telugu *Rama-bhakta* who was born in Choladesa,[1] Sri Tyagaraja. Tyagaraja salutes Ramadas at the very outset in his *Prahlada Bhakti-vijaya.* In two of his pieces Tyagaraja has made a special reference to Ramadas, his sufferings and the blessings of Rama that he eventually received. In the *Kirtana "Kshirasagara sayana"* in *Devagandhari,* Tyagaraja says that he had heard of how Rama liberated Ramadas from the prison :

Dheerudu Ramadasuni bandhanamu
Teerchinadi vinnanura

In *Emitova,* Tyagaraja says "Had I been Ramadas, Sita would have come forward to speak to you on my behalf." The ideas and expressions in Ramadas's songs are echoed by Tyagaraja in several songs ; these I have separately dealt with in another article of mine entitled *Ramadasa and Tyagaraja.*[2] It is to be noted that, apart from the vogue the songs of Ramadas enjoy in devotional congregations (*Bhajana*) some of them continue to be sung in Karnatic music recitals. Portions from several of his songs have already been quoted above. The following song may be given to show the style of Ramadas and his treatment of the subject of devotion to Rama.

"O ye common folk of the world ! Why not buy the medicine of Rama-jogi? (the mendicant from whom medicines and antidotes could be had; the prescription meant here, as given by God Rama is himself, His Name and Worship). When, with love,

1. Tamil Nadu
2. See Journal of the Madras Music Academy, Vol. XXXIX. pp 106-111

Also my Introductory Thesis, *Spiritual Heritage of Tyagaraja,* pp 3, 144 II Edn. 1966. and my '*Forerunners of Tyagaraja in Krit i-composition*' Talk on AIR, Vijayawada, printed in the *Souvenir* of the *Ra sika Ranjam Sabha,* Madras 1968-69.

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you take this remedy of the Rama-mendicant, it completely destroys pride, jealosy, avarice, and the accumulation of *Karmas*. The remedy of Rama-jogi, which is unequalled in the world and destroys the formidable fetters of life, the remedy which cannot be obtained even by spending crores of rupees and is ever remembered by the unequalled devotees of the Lord; the remedy at Bhadradri (the shrine in Andhra for renovating which out of state funds, the Saint was imprisoned), and which helps attainment of salvation and which is ever worshipped with devotion by Ramadasa."

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SHAH ABDUL LATIF

Motilal Jotwani

Shah Abdul Latif has been aptly called the people's poet. Many poets emerged on the literary scene of Sindh before and after Shah Abdul Latif but none understood its people, their sorrows and pleasures, their feelings and aspirations more than Shah Abdul Latif. His was the first great attempt to represent the Sindhi people—both Hindu and Muslim—in the language which was their own, which they spoke in and outside the home. He remains the greatest Sindhi poet till today. The people of Sindh will continue to recite or sing his *baits* and *wais* as they have done for the last more than two hundred years. Even those who have left their land in the wake of partition continue to love and recite them.

Shah Abdul Latif was born in Hala (Sindh) in a notable Sayyid family which traces its original line to Herat. One of his ancestors belonging to Herat came to India with Amir Taimur. He settled in Sindh at Hala (Old) and married in a family of local Sindhi Hala tribe. The exact dates of Latif's birth and death are not established. But the evidence leads us to believe that he was born in 1689 and died in 1752. There were many historical changes in Sindh in the poet's life-time, the major change being that of transfer of power from Moghul to Kalhoro rule in Sindh. But Shah Abdul Latif had little concern with transient politics. The contemporary history passed through the crucible of his mind and expressed itself in his *kalam ;* he, by expressing himself, gave the most vocal expression to his times. Thus, he was the most representative Sindhi poet of his age. Besides, there was, as we have observed, an inner integrity in his life and work. His life was a piece of poetry and his poetry an unconscious record of his life. The two were the constituent parts of one organic

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whole. He was the author of *one* work and we ought to read all his *Surs* in order to appreciate any one of them. A man of *Ishq Haqiqi*, or the True Love, in his life, his *Risalo* is one long wail of *firaq*, or separation.

All his biographers are agreed that he was devoted to spiritual life almost from his childhood. Contemplative by nature, he showed little liking for worldly comforts and remained more or less in seclusion. It is said that when he was barely six and was taught the alphabet, he would not go beyond the first letter *Alif*. *Alif* stands for Allah or God, and oneness with Him. But his father, Shah Habib, was a man of worldly prudence, he said to him, "The opening letter of the alphabet 'Alif' is the Alpha and Omega of knowledge. I also know this mystic truth. But one should not dislike school instruction".

Shah Abdul Latif, it seems, paid heed to his father's advice and rose to be a learned man of his times—a man having complete mastery over his mother-tongue Sindhi and good knowledge of Arabic, Persian, Hindi and other languages of his time and clime. The *Risalo* unmistakably shows that he had studied the Quran and the Traditions, Sufism and Vedantism, party due to his academic training befitting a scion of the Sayyids and partly due to his personal observation of life in the company of Jogis and Sannyasins in his young age. His natural feeling, later in the grown-up life, was that mere book learnedness was no aid to the knowledge of Allah in His varied manifestations :

Learn the letter 'Alif', forget all other learning ;
Purify your heart, how many pages shall you read ?

This should not lead us to believe that he was an illiterate person for such diatribes against book-learning were a common feature of all Sufi poetry. Another *bait*, in quick succession, not only testifies to his knowledge of 'Alif' in particular, but also of the alphabet in general. He says :

O scribe ! as you write 'Alif' and 'Lam' together,
So our Beloved is close to our soul.

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Mir Ali Sher Qan'i Thattawi, who wrote in Persian an account of Sindh and its main cities and holymen in the *Tuhfatul-Kiram* (A.D. 1767) fifteen years after the saint-poet's death, regards Shah Abdul Latif as an "ummi". He does so out of great devotion to him and brings him near to the Prophet, who also is said to have been an "ummi". The word "ummi", as it is mentioned in the Quran for the Prophet before revelation, has been incorrectly translated as "illiterate" by almost all the Sindhi commentators of the Quran. This word is the opposite of *ahl al kitab,* or man of Law given by God. As the Prophet did not know the Law of God previous to the revelation of the Quran, he was referred to as an "ummi".[1]

Shah Abdul Latif was an "ummi" in the sense that he was not an "*ahl al-kitab*" (man of Law), though the *kitab* (Law) in the form of the Quran he knew so well. In the main, he was a great man of *tariqah* and not of *shariah* in the strict sense of the term.

The Holy Quran in Arabic, Rumi's Mathnawi in Persian and Shah Abdul Karim's *baits* in Sindhi—all in manuscript form, these were Shah Abdul Latif's never-failing friends with whom he conversed day by day.

Every dejected lover is a poet. It may not be true in every case, but it was certainly the frustration in love which helped to mature Latif's mind. When he was about twenty he chanced to visit the ailing daughter of Mirza Mughal Beg. The Mirza was a descendant of Chengiz Khan, therefore a choleric by blood. He had great faith in Sayyid Shah Habib being himself unwell he sent his son to offer on his behalf the blessings of the Sayyids. Shah Abdul Latif saw the ailing daughter and was struck by her beauty. He lost his heart there and then. The poet in him was on his lips now. He held her little finger in his hand and said, as if in a dream :

[1] *Cf. Studies in Islam*, Vol. II, p. 62. M. Ajmal Khan rightly argues that the word "ummi" has nothing to do with "illiteracy".

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One whose finger is in the Sayyid's hand need no fear no fall.

And within a few days she recovered from her illness. But Mirza Mughal had taken ill of young Latif's words. He did not say anything to the Sayyids but adopted such means as compelled them to leave Kotri for Haweli, bag and baggage. The Sayyids had built Haweli not very far from Kotri.

Shah Abdul Latif was restless. The longing of love and the pangs of separation would not allow him peace of mind. One day he left his house without informing his parents, and got into the company of some jogis and sannasins with whom he travelled for three years, through Sindh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, etc. The years he thus spent widened his outlook and experience and had a sobering influence on his mind. He saw life at first hand and the insight he thus gained helped him to create the immortal characters of Sasui, Marui, Sohni, etc. Later he was to mention in his works all the places he had visited and the difficult journeys he had undergone. What Sasui experiences while plodding the weary way in the hot sands of Thar, was only a part of his own recollection. In *Sasui Punhu,* as in his other tales of *Lila Chanesar, Mumal Rano, Sohani Mohar,* etc., Shah Abdul Latif embodied what he had himself experienced and felt.

When Shah Latif was 23, Mirza Mughal lost his life in an armed encounter with the robbers who had forced their way in his house. The women of the house attributed this misfortune to the displeasure of the Sayyids. They offered them Mirza's daughter for Latif. Thus Latif won in the end what he had despaired of. Meanwhile the earthly love had led him to a taste of the divine one.

His life thereafter was simple and homely and was spent mainly in contemplation and in composing verses. Nature was his best companion. He loved all and helped many a distressed person. He was highly honoured in his life and people would come from far off places to listen to his winged words. He died in 1752.

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Now let us remove the scaffolding of the biographical account of the saint-poet. It was not without its purpose here, for it will help us to comprehend and enjoy his poetry better. His utterances, in the form of *baits,* were compiled and designated by his disciples as the *Shah-Jo-Risalo,* or the Shah's Message. His *Risalo* is not a philosophical treatise, but it propounds through the love-songs the doctrine of *advaita* (non-dualism).

The external realities or objects also have existence. But that is an unreal one. Objects appearing in a dream are known to be unreal when the dream is over. Likewise, the 'variety of objects' of waking life becomes unreal when nescience or lack of knowledge in the waking life is overcome by the Real Awakening or Realisation. The following two *baits* will illustrate Sankara's view. Shah Abdul Karim, great grandfather of Shah Abdul Latif, says :

> O friend ! all dreams are unsubstantial, no one should trust a dream ;
>
> Asleep, we were together ; when I was awake, he was no longer there.

When Sasui was dreaming, Punhu was with her. When she got up, she found that he had been driven miles away from her. But that is not the Real Awakening. She gains *It* at last, and says in Shah Abdul Latif's *Sur Sasui Abri* :

> As I turned inwards and conversed with my soul,
> There was no mountain to surpass and no Punhu to care for ;
>
> I myself became Punhu...
> only while Sasui, did I experience grief.
>
> * * *
>
> I was misled by *waham* or *maya* ; or else, I was Punhu myself...

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Sasui now is in a state where Kech (Punhu's native place) and Bhambhor (her own place) are reconciled in the One Original Abode and where she feels complete non-attachment with her worldly relatives. Realisation is possible only by becoming one with the object of realisation, by becoming what one would like to become. In that case knowledge will not be of the form, "I know this", but "I am this". Realisation is an intimate knowledge in the form, "I am Brahman" or "I am Huqq", and then there is no transmigration as before. If one living here does not know the self, then there is for him or her endless misery in the form of birth, old age, death, etc. One who 'dies' before death, who while living gives no consideration to body, lives eternally in Him. Shah Abdul Latif also says :

> Who die before death, never will destroyed by dying be.—
> Who live ere second life they see will live eternally.[1]

A person, who has attained the Realisation, never ceases to be what he Really Is. In other words, he never ceases to be the One, though he is in his individual form. An ordinary earthly existence is but a sleep and a forgetting.[2] When a person is really aware of it, he has a negative gain in the sense that he has removed the wrong notion about himself. In Shah Abdul Latif's *Sur Mumal Rano,* Mumal, Rano's wife, under a spell of ignorance, sleeps during her husband's absence with her sister clad in man's (Rano's) attires and thus satisfies her desire of being with him. Rano comes to her palace and goes back. Mumal comes to know of this and weeps drops of blood for him. Now her eyes know no sleep and her being knows no forgetting. And her mind does not get distracted by the worldly objects. She says, "I shall die without you". Her mind becomes still like the flame of a lamp by which she waits for the True Self in whom she yearns to be merged :

1. Translated by Elsa Kazi, *Risalo of Shah Abdul Latif,* Hyderabad (Sindh), 1965, p. 132.
2. Cf. W. Wordsworth *Ode to Immortality*, "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting".

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The whole night my lamp did burn ; the dawn bursts in rays now.

O Rano, come back to me ; I shall die without you.

I've despatched all the crows of Kak Palace as messengers to you.

Mumal receives a message that Rano will come to her at dawn (the Awakening !). Then there are for her no distinctions of forms, classes or castes, etc.

A message new and great from Rano was received last night ;

We received a divine gift from the Giver Himself—

Ask not for caste ; whoever comes, he is welcome.

Liberation, which is another name for Realisation, comes to Mumal now. She is free from the bondage of body and mind. It is a stage that does not admit of any distinction. She sees everything in herself, and herself in everything. She is the entire world, and the entire world is she :

Whither need I drive the camel ? A'l around is His glory ;
Kak Palace is within me and also the gardens here.

There is nothing but peace, nothing but Rano everywhere.

Mumal achieves the union, or the immensity of life, which is without beginning or end. Shah Abdul Latif's Marui lives right from her early age in this immense reality, which the Chieftain Umar's offers of fine clothes and delicious victuals cannot shatter. She says :

Before God created universe, saying : "Be",

And we were not yet separated from Him, my relationship began there and then ;

O my Beloved, I still hold this cognition in me.

Marui is aware of *Turiya,* the Truth, in her life. Even as the thirst for silver does not remain when nacre is known, she never

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feels any desire for the non-self (clothes, food and other material things) when the Self is cognised by her. At last Lila kills her thirst for the diamond-necklace ; Mumal, too, gives up the attachment with her 'person', cognises Rano in herself and thus realises *Turiya*, the Truth, or *Shantih*, the Peace That Passeth Understanding. The Truth Beyond cannot be described :

> Whoever saw the Truth, he spoke nothing : he realized the Peace.

It is not for nothing that the last *bait* of the Sur Mumal Rano (quoted last but two above) closes with the words :

There is nothing but peace, nothing but Rano everywhere.. like the formal ending of the Upanishad : *Shantih Shantih Shantih*. This, however, does not mean that the Absolute is a nothingness or a contentless void. Instead, It is, as stated earlier, the Peace That Passeth Understanding. This is what is meant by *Nahi* or *Adam*, or *Sunj* (*Nothingness*) in Shah Abdul Latif's *Sur Ramkali*. It is the experience of Peace, inexpressible and indescribable :

> The *yogis* became again the Whole, their only concern ;
> Whose seat is in Nothingness, I cannot live without them.
>
> * * *
>
> Where there is no heaven and no trace of the earth,
> Where the moon and the sun neither rise, nor descend,
> That far the *yogis* have set their tryst with the Supreme Knowledge, and they see the Lord in Nothingness.

The stage described in the *bait* given above is the same as that in the Kathopanishad : "Where neither sun nor moon, nor stars shine, nor does lightning strike", Shah Abdul Latif craves and longs for the *yogis*, the human beings in whom inhere the divine qualities, and with whom he travelled far and wide in our country.

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He says :

The *yogis* pack their bags with hunger
and prepare themselves for *junj* or *ananda*,

They desire not the food,
but lustily pour the *thirst* in their cups and sip it,

They flog their minds
until they be like beaten flax.

Thus, they wade through the wasteland
and at last are near regeneration and fertility.

In another *bait* of the same *Sur* the saint-poet says :

Take advantage of their presence,
be with them and enrich your experience,

Soon they'll go a journey to the thought-of distant land,
leave this world of pleasures and reach the holy Ganga.

It is a wasteland on which we live, and Shah Abdul Latif alludes to the Ganga in the above-quoted *bait*. According to a *Puranic* myth, the sacred Ganga waters emanate from the matted locks of the Lord Siva's head and fertilize the barren land. The Ganga, stands for the soul's regeneration through divine ecstasy.

The *Sur Ramkali* makes it clear that a part of Shah Abdul Latif's heritage is derived from the tradition of the *Nath Yogis*. But of course, the poet did not favour mere physical practice of the yogic exercises (*sadhana*) without real spiritual attunement (*bhakti*). As such, there is no reference in his poetry to the entire method of penance as practised by the *Nath Panthis*. His is the *bhavatmak rahasyavada* (mysticism with emotion or devotion at the basis) and not the *sadhanatmak* one (mysticism based on the yogic exercises). His *yogis* are the spiritual people, away from the physical pleasures. They hear the subtle sound pervading the Universe, the unstruck sound or the *Anahata Nada* :

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They wear loin-cloth and need no ablutions,

And hear the subtle call that sounded before the advent of Islam.

They sever all ties and meet their guide, Gorakhnath.

The *Anahata Nada,* or *Sabda,* in its ultimate sense is the same highest symbol Om of the Upanishads. The *Mula Mantra* of the *Jap-Ji* by Guru Nanak, who is popularly described as a Guru of the Hindus and a Pir of the Muslims, opens with this highest mystic syllable, *Ek Omkar Sat-Nam, Kartar, Purkha*....Shah Abdul Latif also says :

Constantly contemplate on this Word, the cure of all your misery

Keep *meem* in your mind and put *alif* before it.

The reference here is to both the sacred sound *Om* (*Om* when written in the Arabic script begins with the letter *alif* and ends with *meem*) and Muhammad-after-Allah (*meem* for Muhammad and *alif* for Allah. Shah Abdul Latif had remained in the company of wandering Jogis, believing in the unity of being. Sankara's *advaita* and the sufis' *wahdah al-wujud* are strikingly similar in their metaphysical quest.

That the poet is deeply influenced by the Indian mystic method is evident also from the fact that he, unlike the Islamic mystics, describes himself (or for that matter the seeker) in the role of a female lover and depicts God as the Man (*Purus*). Kabir says, "Rama is my Husband. I am His little bride." Malik Muhammad Jayasi describes himself in the role of a male love and depicts the Beloved God as a woman. Like Kabir and unlike Jayasi, Shah Abdul Latif becomes Sasui, Mumal, Nuri, Sohni, Lila, Marui and Sorath and feels the pangs of separation, seeks the union with God and is finally united with Him. This explains why the saint-poet has not thought of describing the beauty of his heroines. It is Punhu, Rano, Tamachi, Mehar, Chanesar,

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Khetsen and Diyach who are the very images of beauty in his poetry. Sohni tells her friends :

If you were to see Mehar's face but once.

You would no longer sleep comfortably beside your husbands,

And would not wait to pick up earthen jars as an aid to swim,

But plunge in the river long before me.

Again like Kabir, he refers to Rama as Impersonal God (*Nirguna*). The allusion to Rama in Shah Abdul Latif's poetry is not like the description of Rama in Tulsidasa's *Rama-charita Manasa* in which God is contemplated and envisioned as personal God (*Saguna*).

Religion of the saint-poet even as of his other contemporary poets all over India was essentially of a man in direct relationship with God and not of a particular religious group looking towards the scriptural instructions and injunctions. As is abundantly evident from his poetry, he did not hold the traditional view of forming a part of any particular religious community.

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TAYUMANAVAR

S. Sachidanandam Pillai

The seventeenth century was a period of turmoil in the history of South India. The local chieftains were often quarrelling among themselves, and the East India Companies of European nations, not content with trade, were interfering in local politics and were adding to the confusion. Christian missionaries were also active in the propagation of their religion. Such were the times when saints appeared on the scene and guided the people. Tamil Nadu produced one of the greatest among them, Saint Tayumanavar, who combined a statesman's ability, with spiritual greatness.

At Vedaranyam in the south of the Tanjore district, there was a gentleman named Kedilippa Pillai who belonged to the *vellala* (agricultural) community. The prince in one of his tours saw Kedilippa Pillai working piously and efficiently as a trustee of the Siva temple at Vedaranyam. It struck him that this gentleman would be able to manage the palace affairs quite well and invited him to do so. Kedilippa's son had been given in adoption to his elder brother who was childless and thus became childless himself. He prayed earnestly to Lord Siva at Tiruchirapalli, who is known as God Tayumanavar for a son. This prayer was granted and Kedilippa Pillai's wife Gajavalli gave birth to a son and the boy was naturally called after the benign deity—Tayumanavar[1]. He was born in the year 1705.

The handsome, intelligent boy grew up and mastered three languages—Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit. His writings show that he was well versed in all the schools of philosophy then prevalent. His devotion to God and thirst for God-realisation grew despite the duties in the palace. On the death of his father Tayumanavar had naturally to take duties at the palace and became known for his diligence. There were often threats and attacks from the

1. also known as Tayumanar

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Arcot Nawab's soldiers and Maharatta marauders and it was not easy to withstand all these. On one such occasion when the enemy attack was proceeding outside, Krishnappa Naik of Madurai, who was ruling in the South, met with his death. His queen was a masterly woman and the situation was saved somehow.

Tayumanavar had to continue in his post at the queen's request. His task was now harder than before. A palace supervisor had not only to manage all the court affairs—financial, social, religious and what not—but had also to be a confident of the ruling sovereign. Here came the hitch : the queen found minister Tayumanavar to be admirable not only in the qualities of his head and heart, but also for his personal charm. Tayumanavar, however, was a man of probity and decided to get away from the awkward situation.

His younger brother, Arulayya who later became his disciple, was there to help out Tayumanavar. He told his respected elder brother that a horse was waiting outside the city gate to take him to Ramnad, a comparatively peaceful part of the country. Tayumanavar decided that he should seize the opportunity and left the palace. On reaching Ramnad he was welcomed by the Rajah of the place who arranged for the Saint's quiet stay in meditation, untrammelled by worldly distractions.

After spending some time in that peaceful place, Tayumanavar felt the need to travel to other places of pilgrimage. His visit to Chidambaram is worthy of special mention. At this place is the ancient temple where Lord Siva manifests His cosmic dance and souls released from wordly bondage are supposed to dwell in the ethereal space there in the sanctum. It was about this time, if not earlier, that the Saint began to compose his famous hymns which, apart from their richly suggestive Tamil idilom, are set to various tunes whose haunting melody is surcharged with high wisdom and intense devotion. Many of these songs have come down to us, thanks to the diligent care of his disciple, his younger brother Arulayya. In connection with his visit to Rameswaram a miracle

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has been recorded. There was no rain at all in that region for a long time, and the people naturally prayed to Saint Tayumanavar to relieve them of their sufferings. The holy man took pity on them and pronounced a stanza in *Venba* metre, which may be thus rendered : "O clouds, if it is true that the Siva-faith is the true faith, if the Deity inculcated by it is the Lord who has the crescent moon on His head, if the real path be the control of senses and immersion in bliss—then may you pour down the rain !"

As he was finishing the stanza a cold breeze sprang up, dark clouds filled the sky and heavy showers accompanied by thunder and lightning deluged the parched-up land.

In the meantime, news of the happenings at Tiruchi had reached Tayumanavar's relations at Vedaranyam. His mother especially was anxious that he should lead a householder's life and hence she sent his elder brother Sivachidambaram to find him out at Ramnad and persuade him to return home. So Sivachidambaram travelled all the way via Tiruchi to Ramnad : it was not very difficult to trace the journey of Tayumanavar and Arulayya as the saintly brother had been observed and welcomed by many on the way. So finally Sivachidambaram reached the hut where Tayumanavar was dwelling and conveyed to him his mother's wish. Tayumanavar was unwilling to enter again the worldly life but his respect for his mother as well as his Guru's hint that he should lead a house-holder's life before final initiation, compelled him to accede.

It was a happy coincidence that Tayumanavar's bride was a girl after his own heart, modest and devoted to her husband. She bore him a son named Kanakasabhai reminiscent of the Chidambaram shrine. She left this world of sorrows not long after confinement; the boy was taken care of by Sivachidambaram, and also Arulayya who later initiated him in the spiritual life.

Tayumanavar was now free to devote himself exclusively to God. Ramnad, the former centre of his austerities, irresistibly attracted him. There he could sit under a tamarind tree in self-

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absorption, forgetting the world for days together. Another disciple who joined the Saints service is known as Kodikkarai Jhani. He has recorded that Tayumanavar left this world in the middle of January 1742. The manner of his disappearance is shrouded in legends but his historic intervention in the Portuguese invasion, shortly before his demise, should be mentioned. Setupati, the king of Ramnad, and his kinsman Kattaiya Thevar had a misunderstanding which grew into enmity. Taking advantage of the situation the Portuguese came with a navy to Rameswaram island and hoisted their flag on the famous temple. Setupati did not know what to do but our Saint who sympathized with the world's troubles, could not sit quiet. Reconciling with the royal kinsmen, he caused an army under Setupati's lead to proceed to Rameswaram. But wishing to avoid bloodshed he went in front and spoke to the Portuguese and their missionaries about the sin of human slaughter. The latter were touched but the captain of the navy stood out. However, he too submitted on hearing that the Dutch were attacking his ships. Tayumanavar impressed on his people the need for unity; peace was restored and it was celebrated as a great victory.

The life and teachings of Saint Tayumanavar have a significance for modern times. In early days he was deeply concerned with warring creeds and schools of philosophy, and his own dialectic powers must have been great. Initiated by one in the line of disciples of the great mystic, Saint Tirumular, he practised silent meditation and attained great spiritual heights, acquiring the power of reconciliation of various school of thought. Even after becoming an ascetic and a man of realisation, he followed the tradition of pilgrimage to sacred places, singing an inspiring hymn in each place.

We may ask now whether he did not favour a particular school to shape his own teaching. In his writings we can see a distinct leaning towards pure *Advaita,* quite different from the theory of illusion. This is natural as *Saiva Siddhanta* was developed in Tamilnadu by Saint Meikandar and his followers according to which,

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in addition to the three functions of Deity viz. creation, sustenance and dissolution, we are introduced to the ideas of concealment and the action of grace. First there is the idea and realization of the Transcendent and Immanent, *Paraparam*. Tayumanavar says in *Paraparakkanni* that it is by divine grace that the Lord manifests and governs this earth and other worlds. But being the Absolute, He is above all things material. A mountain of bliss, He is both Immanent and Transcendent. To His devotees He is ever near, knowing their innermost thoughts and wishes and fulfils them by showering His grace. He can be described as the most precious treasure of man or the Highest Knowledge we can conceive. It is to realise Him that the Saint travelled to several sacred places and abodes of saints. His graceful look and consolatory word are prayed for, so that our anxieties may cease for ever. But his fundamental prayer was that we should never forget Him; also that we may consider all beings as our own and be compassionate to them. Even physical immortality is possible by perfection in *Kundalini Yoga*, but to still the unstable mind is a higher achievement. Above all He gives us self-knowledge.

The result of this highest realization is the immersion in Bliss. Tayumanavar had an intense experience of bliss and he describes it in unique terms. God appeared to him as the joy filling the whole universe within and without. Sometimes it is felt as a flood or something indescribable of which conjugal bliss (however inferior) is indicated as a symbol. Indeed Tayumanavar sings about the union in love with the Divine Being as many other saints have done, e.g. in the *Song of Songs and Gita Govinda*.

An apposite point for the proper comprehension of Indian culture is his synthesis of *Vedanta* and *Saiva Siddhanta*. It should be brought home to certain circles in the South that Tayumanavar upholds the greatness of *Upanishadic* doctrine by which many kings and saints had achieved salvation. He speaks of the various schools of philosophy as rivers which flow from different directions into the one ocean of Truth. Similarly, he says out of his experience that all forms of *Yoga* are subsumed into the supreme *Yoga*.

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He has pointed out clearly that *Dvaita,* the doctrine of duality, which indeed embraces all multiplicity, is only a step to arrive at *Advaita,* the doctrine and experience of unity. 'Hearing' (*sravana*) is *charya,* 'contemplation' (*manana*) is *kriya,* and 'realization' or sure experience is *Yoga*; this explains the similarity or even identity of the methods of *Vedanta* and *Siddhanta.* To quote from his *Paripurna Anandam* (the Full Bliss): "My work is always Thy work, my individuality is not separate from Thee and hence I am not foreign to Thy being. This is the way to reconcile *Vedanta* and *Siddhanta,* to be sure!" (stanza 5). Obviously the "emotional integration" of the followers of different paths was no problem to Saint Tayumanavar. A very telling symbolism he makes use of is that the horse of *Agama* gallops on the road of the *Veda*!

While on this topic we may mention that Tayumanavar in all his writings does not set much store by the various stories of God and the Godly in the *Puranas.* At least some of those stories are apt to mislead us, with the fast changing mentality of modern times. Hence this Saint always emphasises the original principles which enlighten us about God and the things that are holy. It shows how a man who successfully took a prominent part in the important affairs of this world could also find himself quite at home among highly abstract principles. 'God has neither caste nor family, birth nor death, bondage nor release ; form, formlessness nor any name !' (*Porul Vanakkam,* Stanza 5). As he is timeless He is without any distinction of day or night. There is no limitation or defect in Him, so He is the integral, *Purnam.*

A homely representation of these fundamental truths is also possible. We the ordinary souls are compared to cows or animals in general—*Pasu ;* our state of bondage is the rope, *pasam ;* the Lord who releases us is *Pati.* In fact *Pasupati* which is a name of Siva points to the One who is our Overlord. He takes care of us, 'feeds' us and shelters us, always sees to it that we do not go astray. As we grow thus under His protection, some of the souls become gradually 'ripe'—*pakva* or fit for salvation ; then He releases such souls from bondage. But as He is

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gracious and impartial to all, He brings up solicitously even those who 'ripen' rather slowly ; hence no one is outside the pale of salvation or *moksha* for ever. Needless to say, the Lord does not look for any return for this act of grace, although it is natural for the released souls to feel grateful and hence bound to Him (not bound to the world as before) for all the time thence. But does He come before us in person ? That happens only to the most highly evolved souls who are capable of superhuman efforts (*tapas*) for the purpose ; to all others who are thirsting for grace, He sends his emanations or saints according to the need of each soul. Indeed one form of Siva is Dakshinamurti or the Teacher who illumines by silence. This form of God is represented as a young person sitting under a banyan tree, surrounded by four aged sages who are the eternal wise men. These four are utterly devoid of egotism and can, by their blessings, give the light and bliss of salvation to thousands of souls.

Many of Tayumanavar's songs are surcharged with emotion and show a close intimacy with God. Perhaps a good specimen is the famous song beginning *Ponnai matarai* from which we may cull a few stanzas.

> "Lord of my life who hast sought me, I was seeking gold, women and land ! Henceforth I will seek only Thee and the pure ether of Thy grace."
>
> "Thou hast said that whatever is called mine is really Thine, so I have consecrated it all to Thee. O life of this poor one ! If Thou should'st subject me again to grief, how can I be saved ?"
>
> "Without proper behaviour or good qualities, ignorant of the way of Thy grace, can this little one be saved ? Eating poison Thou dids't come forth as nectar ! It is time to see my Father's high status. . ."
>
> "O Lord, doubtless Thou hast made my body and its actions harmonise with the inner spirit. False though I

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be, when will the falsehood of my mind cease and result in the full and true bliss ?"

"Dwelling in me as my life, won't it be moral for Thee to wipe off sorrow from my mind ? My mind knows only to think of Thy graceful face of intense beauty..."

Tayumanavar had experience of these great ones and when he was dwelling in a hut near Ramnad in his later life, he spoke about their wonderful knowledge and power to his disciples Arulayya and Kodikkarai Jnani.

Mention must be made here about the *siddhas*—the perfect ones—whom Tayumanavar adored. They made their bodies and minds perfect by following Ashtanga (*or Raja*) *Yoga* of the sage Patanjali.

Tayumanavar's intense yearning for realization will be evident from the four stanzas in which he quotes a word or phrase from the hymns of the first four great Saivite saints, asking poignantly when he will attain their sublime realization. The means for such attainment is revealed as abiding in unity and the consequent bliss by initiation of the one word "sit quiet !" (*Anandakkalippu*, 14)

He says that his desire is to propagate the gospel of "non-killing" throughout the world (*Paraparakkanni*, 54). He prays for divine grace so that he may have the compassion born of considering his life as quite similar to the lives of all (*ibid*, 65).

We shall conclude by echoing Tayumanavar's sentiment that the service of saints is the surest and easiest means to attain the state of Bliss.

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RAMALINGA SWAMI

K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar

Over one hundred years ago, on 30 January 1874, *Vallalar* Ramalinga Swami the apostle of *Samarasa Suddha Satya Sanmarga* or the universal religion of humanity retired to a room in the 'Abode of Siddhi' near Vadalur not far from Chidambaram in South India, and was never seen again alive or dead. By a curious coincidence, seventy-four years later, 30 January 1948 was to be the day of martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi, another prophet of human unity and universal well-being. In some important respects, Gandhiji's ministry and martyrdom were a continuation and partial fulfilment of Ramalinga Swami's great mission in life. They were both essentially men of God, and if Ramalinga ultimately identified Reality with *Arutperum-Jyoti* or the Light Divine, Gandhiji too finally saw God as Truth and had a particular fascination for Newman's celebrated hymn 'Lead Kindly Light!' Ramalinga and Gandhiji are surely among the supreme benefactors of humanity—*Vallalars*—angels and ministers of Grace—who come down from time to time to apply correctives to the fallen human condition and make efforts to raise it up.

Again, like Ramakrishna Paramahamsa in Bengal, like Dayanand Saraswati in Western India, Ramalinga Swami in Tamil Nadu was also a prophet of the dawn of Renascent India after the darkness and bleakness consequent on the trauma of British conquest and the subsequent national humiliation. The country no doubt needed economic, political, social and cultural rejuvenation, but more basically still what the country needed was a moral and spiritual regeneration, and men like Ramakrishna, Dayanand and Ramalinga were the potent power-houses

The free English renderings from Ramalinga Swami's original Tamil poems are by the author.

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of such resurgence. Ramakrishna took the Kingdom of Heaven by violence and brought it down, Dayanand was an evangelist and organizer of genius, and Ramalinga was the poet of sovereign compassion, the apostle of universal love, benevolence and harmony. Then came Swami Vivekananda who carried the Paramahamsa's message to the ends of the world, Narayana Guru in Kerala who brought about a social and religious revolution, Ramana Maharshi in Tamil Nadu who embodied in himself the utter poise of the Infinite, Gandhiji himself, and Sri Aurobindo the Prophet of the Life Divine. If Ramalinga Swami anticipated Gandhiji's acute social concern and his enfranchising universal love, he also shared Sri Aurobindo's vision of Supramental Light and his dream of revolutionary change and physical transformation. On the other hand, Ramalinga harked back too (so one might think) to the Tamil mystics of earlier ages—Tirumoolar, Manikkavachakar, Sambandhar, Appar, Sundarar, Pattinattar, Arunagiri, Tayumanavar—and was a God-intoxicated God-realized hymnist whose *Tiruarutpa* has already taken its place along with *Tirumandiram*, *Tevaram*, *Tiruvachakam* and other classics of mystic and devotional poetry.

Ramalinga's 'life' is briefly told. He was born at Marudur near Chidambaram on 5 October 1823, as the youngest of his father's five children. The privileges of birth, affluence and formal education were not Ramalinga's and his life ran a course unconventional and unpredictable. When he was taken as a child of five months to the Temple of Chidambaram, he had an experience which he was to recall in later years as follows :

> When my mother took me as a baby
> To the sanctum at Tillai—
>
> You revealed to me, as the curtain rose,
> All the transcendental Truth;
>
> Sheer God knowledge ripened in my nonage,
>
> O my soul's sap and Home !

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Losing his father early, he migrated with the family to Madras after a very brief interregnum at Ponneri. In the Muthialpet area in Madras City, Ramalinga grew up under the guardianship of his elder brother Sabapathy and his wife, and often felt attracted, as iron to the magnet, to the Lord in the Kandakottam temple. As a boy of nine, while still living in his brother's house, Ramalinga had a singular experience. Looking into the mirror in his room he saw, not his own reflection, but the Lord at Tiruttani :

Six beautiful faces, twelve shoulders
Matching and imperious :
The whole crowned by a garland of flowers—
And ravishing lotus-feet.
With his sharp battle-axe, he was mounted
On his majestic peacock.
All lit by aura of Grace—thus I saw
Thanika's Lord in the glass.

In the coming years, Ramalinga was constantly God-intoxicated, and spent much of his time either in silent contemplation or in fulsome praise of the Lord in one or another of His auspicious Forms. Although he had no regular schooling, he became quickly intimate with the classics of Saiva devotional literature, and gave impromptu discourses before large congregations, carrying conviction by the fervour of his voice and the force of his winning personality. He also composed songs with extemporaneous ease almost since his ninth year, pouring forth song after song comprehending the entire gamut of *bhakti* or God-love. There are occasional hints in his verse relating to some of his boyhood experiences :

Once when as a boy I slept all alone
On a *pial,* and slipped down,
Wasn't it You that held me up in Your arms,
And then gently let me down ?
Once as I lay asleep on a *pial,*

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A boy wearied and hungry,
You brought me a plate of the choicest food
And fed me so graciously . . . .
Sambanda ! Immortal Siva-Guru !
Refuge of the devotees !
In the days of my green and callow youth
When I had no light within
And I lacked the steady light of knowledge
And strength of experience,
You led me up to narrow path of Grace,
With no slipping afterwards.

It is not surprising that, although married at a young age to his elder sister's daughter, Ramalinga should have soon turned away from married life, the call Divine being far stronger.

Ramalinga's 'inner' life—which was infinitely more significant than his 'outer' existence—was a journey and a quest, a fairly protracted struggle with its vicissitudes of defeat and success, gloom and ecstasy; and it may also be described as a movement from Muruga at Kandakottam to Muruga at Tiruttani, thence to Tyagesar at Tiruvottriyur, and finally to Nataraja at Tillai (Chidambaram). Ramalinga's ardour for the Divine—whether as Muruga, Tyagesar or as Nataraja—was more compelling than an ardent bride's for her Lord, and indeed many of Ramalinga's song-sequences are couched in the traditional language of bridal mysticism. Here, for example, the 'Bride' (Ramalinga) confides to her comrades with assurance and candour :

He will come, my friends, riding a peacock;
Bhaktas will receive largesse :
My friends, He is crowned with unsullied fame;
Let's sing His glories and dance.

Here is another charming piece of disarming naivete :

I spoke fair to the great lord at Otri :
"Come to my house and take food,
And after the siesta you may go."

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He came, I served Him with food.
But He only said, "You have deceived me !"
Oh my friend, what did He mean ?

In other poems, however, as in the famous *Mahadevi Malai* for example,—it is rather the mystic and the pantheist that speaks to us. The verses seem to have torrentially tumbled out of Ramalinga's lips, and there is rich improvisation as well as utter ease and naturalness in the poetic utterance. Here are a few stanzas :

O lord ! Thou art seed, sprout, seedling,
The pith and marrow of all,
Foliage, fruit and their beneficiary :

Thou art segment and fulfilled whole,
Essence, experience, bliss,
Poise of universal witness self ;

Thou art pearl, ruby and sole
Immortal Diamond: . . .

O Lord ! Thou art gold, jewel, adornment
Without and within,
And purity;
Thou art earth, mountain and sea,
Moon, Sun and the Heavens ;

Thou art beginning, end, and the realm between—
From the cloud-burst of Thy Grace issue
The full resonant thunder,
The lightning-flash
And flooded bliss . . .

Thou art indeed my life, O lord,
The life of my life and my soul's mate ;

Thou art my own mother and father both,
My priceless possession,
My heart's love,
My code of Dharma,
My kith and kin;

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Thou art my Guru elect, my bliss of union
My whole existence
And my Lord Protector.

Of the vicissitudes of his spiritual journey, again, many of the confessional asseverations speak movingly :

Entangled in the mire of worldly life
I wriggle and forget You :

Bear with me yet, and forgive, O My Lord
Of Thanikachalam Hill. . . . .

I was once vile beyond comparison
Yet You have refashioned me

A flame-like mind in a golden body
With supreme understanding :

You've led me to all realizations
And ecstatic *ananda* ;

How shall I describe Your benefactions ? ...

Thinking of the great Sun's diurnal course
And the dreaded run of Time,

Grieve not worried about the God of Death
And his angry attention.

Remember Markandeya's victory,
and chant *Namas-sivaya*. . . .

The name of the Lord is the sure refuge
Of all those that hasten to Him . . .

O this great effulgent Grace bestowed on me
By the Lord's boundless mercy :

He launched me as a mother in the world
To do my great ministry,

And gave me a deathless golden body
And a matching soul within.

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It is probable that, attaining the middle stage of his life, Ramalinga felt he had enough of the hurry and noise and strife of the metropolis, reacted strongly against its derailments and distractions, and decided definitively to respond to the call of the Lord at Tillai. Visiting the temple, he experienced again the mystical tremendum of his childhood recognition, adoration and ecstasy in the presence of Nataraja. He settled down for a few years at Karunguzhi, but he travelled also a good deal, gave discourses and indited songs. His vision of Reality grew new dimensions, he continually saw the Divine in Man and circumambient Nature, and he seized the ultimate equation of Creator with his Creation. Ramalinga would have none of the man-made divisions of caste, creed, dogma or ritual, and he eloquently preached against all forms of bigotry, cruelty and human inequity. More and more he visualized Reality or the Divine as pure and puissant Light—*Arut-perum-Jyoti* and saw in its realization alone the clue to life-transformation including the possible transformation of the human body. From our flawed life to life in love—than life charged with Grace—and, as the apotheosis, life suffused with delight or *ananda*! Ramalinga took also several practical steps in the last period of his life to advance the realization of his ideal of human harmony and global well-being. He gave a central place in his scheme of life to the play of compassion, and he saw that the mystic vision of *Arut-perum-Jyoti* was allied to the complementary power of *Tanip-perum-Karunai* (uniquely sovereign compassion) :

Every time I saw crops withering,
I withered too; as often
As I saw hungry destitute beggars,
I too fainted with hunger :
The sight of chronic victims to disease
Made me tremble like a leaf;

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And the defeat of the meritorious
Has made me wilt in pain ...
Compassion has overwhelmed me as oft
As I've mixed with living beings ...
My life's run and soul of compassion are one
Not wholly different things;
My life must cease when my compassion dies —
I swear this at Your feet.

He established the *Samarasa Veda Sanmarga Sangha* in 1865, and the *Satya Veda Dharmasala* two years later. The same year saw the publication of a collection of his songs and mystical outpourings called *Tiru-Arutpa* (The Golden Book of Grace), and this both consolidated Ramalinga's popularity as a singer-saint and provoked a somewhat acrimonious controversy. It was thought by some people that the use of the word *Arutpa* by Ramalinga was rather sacrilegious, since it sought to put the book on a par with *Tevaram* and *Tiruvachakam*. Opinion was for a time sharply divided between orthodoxy led by the formidable Arumuga Navalar and the followers of Ramalinga Swami. It is said, however, that when there was an actual confrontation in the court, Navalar too, like the rest, rose to greet the serene white-clad Ramalinga Vallalar. It was only some years after Ramalinga's passing away that *Tiru-Arutpa* could win universal acceptance, both as a body of hymns and as poetry compounded at once of radiant sincerity, sparkling clarity and honeyed sweetness.

From his boyhood almost, Ramalinga had been composing songs as the mood or occasion dictated, and six thousand of these verses have been collected and enshrined in the Six Books of *Tiru-Arutpa*. But it is fairly certain that a large number, as they were extemporaneously sung, were never actually recorded, or the records could not be traced at the time the collection was

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prepared for the press. Even so *Tiru-Arutpa* is a truly impressive and inspiring body of devotional poetry, and the definitive Ooran Adigal's edition of 1972 has arranged the songs and song sequences for the first time in their strict chronological order. The one perennial theme is the Divine, but Ramalinga plays numberless variations on it, using with marvellous dexterity about thirty varieties of metrical form and many popular tunes. Repetition, refrain, assonance, alliteration, rhyme, all appear as naturally as leaves spring up on a tree in the season of spring. And yet it is the *bhava,* the utter earnestness and sincerity, the total absorption in the Divine, the complete identification with all humanity and all life that made *Tiru-Arutpa* wholly worthy of the name, a rare testament of Divine love that strikes a responsive chord in seasoned scholar and unlettered commoner alike. The very qualities of spontaneity, emotive richness and mellifluous sweetness that make the songs immediately so moving and effective also made them untranslatable, the more so into a language like English with its own poetic tradition and structural idiosyncracies. The renderings, to be readable at all, have to be freely experimental. My English renderings in the course of this essay are such tentative experiments, and here are a few more:

O Thou Mountain within love's grasp :
O sovereign Power inhabiting Love's hut :
Thou Omnipresence caught in Love's net :
Nectar held in Love's hand :
Ocean contained in Love's pitcher :
Thou Light of Knowledge that's love,
Thou Effulgence packed in atomic Love,
Thou Lord Supreme incarnate in Love.....
I'll sing, or I'll bend,
If Thou willest I should :

I'll dine, or be humbled, or sleep,

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Or keep awake and active,
If you must have it so :

What's it that by itself
my insignificance can do ?

Like the generations of plantain-trees
Are the line of devotees.

Am I not one in their unending line ?

How is it, then, I suffer ?

Can you countenance it ?—Is it proper ?
Has it Your divine sanction ?

O my Lord Dancer in the Golden Hall,
Am I not your son indeed ?

I can no longer endure this burden
Of totality of pain.

Turn here and now your effulgence of Grace
And end my night of sorrow—

O my blissful Dancer-King, wear this garland
Of praise for my well-being :

For impartially you charge with delight
The learned and unlearned :

You concede the rare gift of sight alike
To those who see, and won't see ;

You are Bounty, and it flows equally
To the puissant and the weak ;

You are Reason, that guides the perceptive
And the unreasonable ;

O Justiciar abiding with the pure
As well as the pernicious :

Thou Goodness that must decree the good
Of gods, as also titans !

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My mind of adamant has now melted
And thirsts for communion ;
The intellect is stilled, Love wells up and
Overflows : *This is the time*.....

For a change, there is this bit of light-hearted musing by Ramalinga on being invited to a wedding :

Nor shoes nor shirt spotless white :
Nor fresh dhoti, nor style :
Nor cash in hand, nor bulky frame :
No home, no daring—
O my mind, how will you enact
The Wedding Guest ?

On the other hand, Ramalinga had no doubt at all regarding his role as Messenger of God :

I've been vouchsafed
The Grace of God
And sent to sow the seed
Of the way of Truth
In the flawed hearts
Of the world's hypocrites—
To help them attain *here*
The bliss of Divine Life.

It was not, however, Ramalinga Swami's aim any more than it was the Buddha's, Guru Nanak's or Ramakrishna Paramahamsa's—to establish an entirely new religion. He rather aimed at affirming and bringing out the throbbing warmth at the heart of all true religious experience. He felt strongly that caste, creed, blind custom, dogma, superstition, ritual or dialectics should not divide man from man, or raise barriers between man and God. He founded *Satya Jnana Sabha* (presently amplified into *Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Satya Jnana Sabha*) in 1872 at Vadalur, and it was housed in a specially constructed octagonal building where the Ultimate was symbolized as *Jyoti* or Light. The *Sabha* was

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to be a place of prayer where people drawn from diverse religions, sects, castes and creeds could transcend all doctrinal adhesions and constrictions and breathe the ambience of the Love Divine (*Tanip-perum-karunai*) and bask in the sovereignty of the Light Divine (*Arut-perum-Jyoti*). In his own culminating experience, Reality had come to him as the Light Divine at the heart of all creation, a Light feeding and fed by the Love Divine; and it was Divine Grace that compelled the play of both Light and Love. Thus *Arut-perum-Jyoti* became Ramalinga's *mantra* of *mantras,* the *mul-mantra,* and in his *Arut-perum-Jyoti Ahaval* and elsewhere he made these grand affirmations :

Grace the supreme Light ! Grace the supreme Light !
Grace the Supreme Light ! The Grace !

Crowned on *Agama*, on the *Veda* crowned,
And soaring higher: the Grace !

Who helped me beyond the seven oceans
Of birth and bondage ? the Grace !

Biggest of the big, smallest of the small,
Rarest of the rare; the Grace !

Centred in my mind, diffusing global
Illumination : the Grace !.....

O great mystery of creation out
Of earth, womb, sweat, egg: the Grace !

The Light Divine that knows
No beginning, middle or end
Has wholly mingled in
My heart's blood-stream ;

I too have become the Permanent.
Beyond caste, creed or dogma ;
In the High Street of Pure Existence
I bear witness to You !

What Ramalinga wished to see securely established was a new society whose members were electrically free from all

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man-made limitations, and living in the enfranchizing and harmonizing play of Light and bound to one another by the vibrations of the universal force of Love. He preached too—in this anticipating Sri Aurabindo—that the *summum bonum* of life was not an escape into another world of felicity or *Nirvana, a Kailasa* or *Vaikuntha,* but rather the winning of an Earthly Paradise. Here, for example, is one of his moving exhortations :

Come, O worldly men
Grovelling in misery :

Through constant brooding
And steady understanding—
Melting in emotion,
Bathed in Perennial tears
Filled with love—

Imploring the soul's Lord,
Nectar of Grace,
Delight of Being,
King of Enlightenment—

Know that you can all gain
The deathless life ....

This is the time to enter
The golden Life Divine.

And yet the heights of realization reached by the Saint in the course of a career wholly dedicated to Love of God and Service to Man were not to be reached in a sudden canter by common humanity. It is therefore hardly to be wondered at that many of his disciples and followers fell short of his expectations, driving him at last to lock up the *Sabha* and take away the key to *Siddhivilaham* or 'Abode of Siddhi' which was his own modest residence. For himself, however, there was no need for any journeying farther, for he had arrived and won the Lord. Traditionally Ramalinga composed the magnificent *Anubhava-Malai* (The Garland of Realization) on 30 January, 1874, the last day of his

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life. By its very nature, the pull of the human soul towards Siva, of *pasu* for *pati,* of Ramalinga Swami for Nataraja evokes a measure of erotic imagery, though not to the same degree as in the imagined Radha-Krishna relationship. There are thus passages in *Anubhava-Malai* that are cast in the purest *nayaki-nayaka-bhava* and are full of the music of bridal mysticism without the slightest taint of mere eroticism :

My eyes had met, and when our hands were linked,
I was lost to my senses ;

I knew why Veda says God-experience
Surpasses all human joys ;

Whenever I recall that moment's bliss
Of Divine communion,

Once more that ecstasy floods me again,
As if happening only then.....

It was when my Spouse took me visibly

I thrilled quaffing elixir ;

But how shall I in words express the joy
Of the inner union ?

No mere humdrum sensory affair this.
But pure God experience—

There was no separativity ;

I was IT, and both were ONE.

In an earlier poem too Ramalinga had recorded :

Faster and faster I mounted steps,

I sipped nectar in amaze;

My mind softened and melted, tears flowed free,
And thoughts simmered in delight.

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Then illuminative wisdom welled up
And I saw the supreme Lord,
And instead of my useful skin-and bone,
I had a golden body.

He had arrived, and he would have gladly guided others too to the goal; such, as he saw it, was also his mission:

People are fair in form yet foul within,
but God's Grace has missioned me

To scatter the seeds of truthful living
Among the hypocrites' hearts,

Alchemise and make them experience
The Life Divine here and now.

Yet he had to realise at last that people—including many of his immediate disciples—were not as yet ready for the quantum leap that would change the current egoistic mentality swearing by division and separativity and enacting inequity and misery into a new consciousness that would be wedded to the true Light and practise compassion and grace. The average run of humanity still wanted short-cuts and miraculist mumbo-jumbo, and not the bigger change and spiritual transformation. Ramalinga Swami therefore decided to withdraw from the scene. It is agreed that Ramalinga entered his room about midnight on 30 January 1874, and was never seen again. When the room was opened days later, even his clothes had disappeared. During his last years he had often speculated and spoken on the ideal and actual possibility of physical transformation and immortality, and perhaps he had gone far in his *sadhana* of change and transfiguration. Writing in 1930 Sri Aurobindo made a pointed reference to Ramalinga Swami : "There was a Yogi sometime ago in this region who thought it, but he hoped when the change was complete, to disappear in Light". Did Ramalinga at last merge in the *Arut-perum-Jyoti*—the Great Effulgence—which in his last days he had invoked so often :

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Earnestly I sought from you
The Elixir of Immortality :

Give it now ;
Else You'll be blamed
For the loss of my life :

Tell me, my Lord.
Whether You want the blame or me.

In one of the verses in his final song *Anubhava-Malai,* Ramalinga almost makes a quick summary of his life ;

In my nonage He made me indite songs
In praise of His holy feet ;

He dismissed my numerous transgressions
As youthful frivolities ;

The great Dancer-King took me in marriage
And wholly mingled in me.

How may I find words to describe the bliss
Of this ecstatic union ?

It is a condition of blessedness
Decreed by the Grace Divine.

The verse that by tradition was the very last uttered by him may serve as his requiem :

Fools praised me as I blabbed in my folly,
Yet You gave all I desired ;

Banishing all fear, I feed on nectar,
And a blissful sleep in mine.

It was a particular kind of Light—liberating, light-giving, love-radiating—that Vallalar Ramalinga Swami invoked in our midst, particularly at a time of heavy mist and darkness, and over one hundred years after his passing, that Light burns brighter than ever.

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CORRECTIONS

Page	*Para*	*Line*	*Incorrect*	*Correct*
vii	1	17	imusions	invasions
3	1	2	*Sachitya*	*Sahitya*
20	1	6	Oblivision	oblivion
22	1	12	Belover,	Beloved,
61	Last	10	*Rasa-Srinagar*	*Rasa-Sringar*
92	1	17	Anandabhauvan	Anandabhuvan

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CULTURAL LEADERS OF INDIA

With the decline of Hindu Kingdoms, the ideals and institutions of Dharma and Bhakti faced great threat. At that time came on the scene a line of saints and mystics who brought the wisdom of the ancients to the common people. They successfully adopted the medium of song in spreading wisdom and knowledge of the ancients.

In this volume, an attempt has been made to present the contributions of these devotional poets and mystics to the emotional integration of the country. They belonged to different regions and religions of the country. With satire and sarcasm and in homely language with similes and symbols, they declaimed against hypocrisy and corruption and empty forms and rituals. These minstrels of God kept up the morale of the people and highlighted the superiority of spiritual values over mundane pursuits.

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